





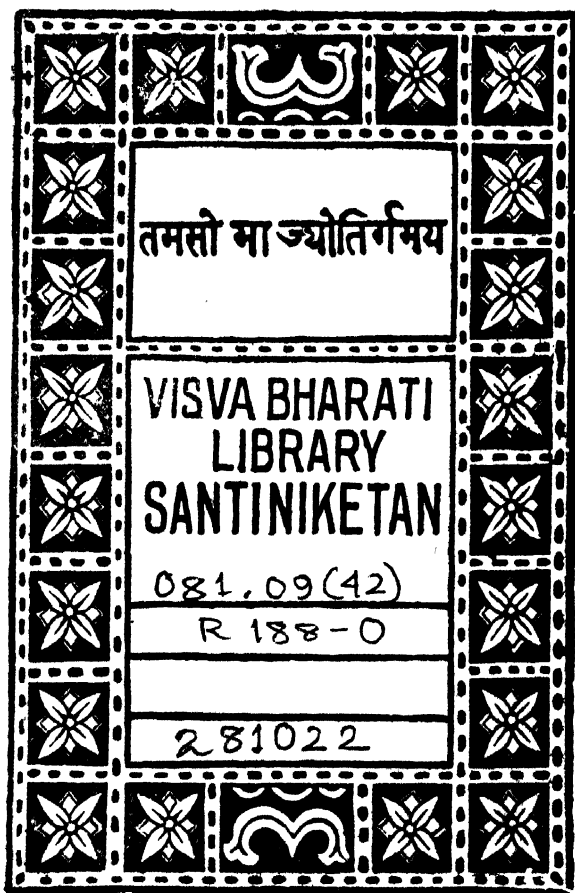






# On the Edges of Time

Rathindranath Tagore



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Rathindranath Tagore

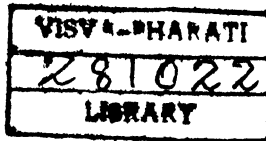
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# ON THE EDGES OF TIME

RATHINDRANATH TAGORE

*Let your life lightly dance on the edges of Time  
like dew on the tip of a leaf.*

THE GARDENER, xlv



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*To the memory of*

YUSUF MEHERALLY

*but for whose encouragement and insistence  
this book would never have been completed or published*





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The twelve illustrations which appear at the head of pages 1, 19, 33, 38, 41, 57, 65, 76, 92, 97, 144, 147 were drawn by Prasanta Roy. The photograph of Rathindranath published in this book is in the collection of Rabindra-Bhavana, Santiniketan.

## PREFACE

I am told these reminiscences may be of some help to those who are interested in the life and works of my father. My memory chooses to highlight certain events without going into factual details or following a chronological sequence, but it is possible that from the somewhat disconnected anecdotes penned during leisure hours at different times and put together in these pages, the reader may obtain glimpses of some aspects of my father's personality not dealt with by his biographers.

I shall remain ever grateful to Krishna Kripalani, Indira Devi Chaudhurani, Nirmal Chandra Chatterji, Amal Home and especially to Kshitis Roy for their ungrudging help in various ways in the preparation of this book. Thanks are also due to the Visva-Bharati for permission to use certain portions that have appeared in the pages of the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*.

[ 1958 ]

Rathindranath Tagore



ON THE EDGES  
OF TIME





### *A Boy is Born*

In my uncle Satyendranath's house, where the grown-up members of the family gathered almost every evening, there used to lie a bound volume of blank pages in which were jotted down conundrums, witty remarks, nonsense rhymes, as also words of wisdom that occurred to the minds of those who happened to be present. The book was called the *Pāribārik Khātā*—the Family Notebook. While looking through its pages I came across pencilled notes which could not fail to interest me. Even at the risk of breaking the solemn rule that the contents of the book were not to be published I am quoting the words. May my ancestors forgive me !

Uncle Rabi's Baby—A forecast.

Uncle's baby will be a fortunate boy, not a girl.  
He will not be as laughter-loving as uncle, but comparatively serious. He will not go about doing social work but will prefer to live apart in solitude and devote himself to religious prayer.

*Park Street House*  
*November 1888*

Hitendranath Tagore

Hit-da, the subject of your prophecy has now become visible. One must admit that he is serious by nature. But I don't think the baby will become a forest sage instead of a social creature. And because he is serious it does not follow that he won't laugh. Uncle Rabi's nature is also fundamentally serious if you come to think of it. There is a difference between seriousness and moroseness.

*March 1890*

Balendranath Tagore



How far the above prophecies made by my cousins have come true is not for me to say, but I must disclaim the credit of having spent my days in prayer and meditation.

To be born in a family where more than a hundred members lived under one roof is a matter of no great significance in our country. Moreover, I happened to be the son of the youngest of the brothers, my father being the last surviving son of my grandfather. Our Jorasanko house had seen so many grandsons born before my appearance on the scene that I suppose the event was not considered worth celebrating. Nevertheless my mother must have felt some pride and satisfaction in having given birth to her first male child, although he did not promise to be as fair and good-looking as her first-born. My sister was indeed a very pretty child and therefore much petted by the whole family. My life thus started with a handicap which gave me a complex that has been difficult to overcome even at a mature age. Moreover, I remained the youngest of the cousins. Even as a child I felt my inferior position and this made me more and more of a retiring and unsociable disposition as I grew up. In a joint family the children have many advantages, but there is also the danger of competition beginning at too early an age and this is to the disadvantage of those who are weak and suffer under some handicap.

### *The Tagores*

The Tagores belong to the Bandyopadhyaya group of Bengali Brahmins. The genealogy can be traced back to Daksha, one of the five Brahmins who were imported sometime in the 8th century from Kanauj to help in reviving orthodox Hinduism in Buddhist-ridden Bengal. The descendants of this Brahmin moved from one place to another until one Panchanan in 1690 settled down at Govindapur near Calcutta. The opportunities of making money in this flourishing mercantile town, the stronghold of the East India Company, finally attracted the family to Calcutta in the latter part of the eighteenth century and they built their homes at Pathuriaghata and Jorasanko.

There is a story that, while the family was living at a place near Khulna and serving the Moslem governor there, two of the brothers lost their caste in a peculiar manner. It happened

this way. The brother Kamadev one day during the fast of Roza noticed that a courtier of the Governor was smelling a lemon. Jestingly Kamadev told him that he had broken his fast because, according to the *Sastras*, smelling is half-eating. The courtier did not argue with him but repeated the words to the Governor. A few days later the members of the Thakur family (the name of Tagore had not come into use at that time) along with other Hindus were invited by the Governor to attend a musical entertainment. In the adjoining room a feast consisting of meat dishes was being prepared. The savoury smell penetrated to the entertainment hall. Holding their noses, the Hindus wanted to leave. The Governor told them that since by smelling they have partially eaten the dishes they might as well stay and do full justice to them. Kamadev and his followers thus lost their caste and were looked down upon by orthodox Hindus as Pirali (Pir-Ali) Brahmins.

Not only were the ancestors of the Tagores wanderers in the province of Bengal moving from one place to another and never settling down, but latterly they were looked upon as outcasts. They had to depend upon their own resources and struggle to win any sort of position in society. They soon found that this could be done only by accumulation of wealth. These two factors probably helped to develop the pioneering spirit and the freedom of mind that could rise above all social and religious conventions which are the basic characteristics of the Tagore family. Once they had accumulated wealth and gained the assurance of comfortable living their spirit went adventuring in other realms and their talents effloresced in many a direction.

### *Prince Dwarkanath*

My great-grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, was a romantic figure. Contemporary of Rammohan Roy, the Father of the Renaissance Movement of Bengal, he was closely associated with him in all his activities and rendered financial help whenever required. The East India Company were by this time firmly established in Bengal and were rapidly building up their trade. Dwarkanath's knowledge of English helped him to take advantage of the conditions prevailing under the

Company's rule and he was able at quite an early age not only to amass a fortune but also to gain high offices under the British. With Rammohan Roy he took a leading part in all the movements for the promotion of higher education and social welfare. There was hardly any institution founded during his life-time that did not owe its existence to the generous charity of Dwarkanath. He came to be known as Prince Dwarkanath in recognition of his benefactions. His business enterprises extended to fields unexplored by Indians in those days. He had a fleet of cargo boats for trading between India and England. To improve his business connections and gain further concessions from the Company, he himself went to England accompanied by his youngest son, Nagendranath. I have had occasion to read the diary kept by this grand-uncle of mine. It describes vividly and in very chaste English the social life of the aristocracy of England in the early Victorian age as seen through the eyes of an Indian. There is also an interesting description of his adventurous journey across the country from Bombay to Calcutta at a time when India was in a very disturbed condition on the eve of the Sepoy Mutiny.

Soon after landing in London Dwarkanath became a favourite of Queen Victoria and of the court circle. There are many amusing stories told about his exploits in England and France some of which I came to know from the letters written by his valet. While staying in London he was once invited to a hunting party. The arrangement was that the party would call at his hotel to pick him up and ride out to the country where the hunt would take place. When his friends came he begged to be excused complaining of a rheumatic pain in the leg which rendered him unfit for riding. After much persuasion he was prevailed upon to accompany them, not riding on a horse but comfortably seated in a carriage. Thus the Londoners were treated to the amusing spectacle that morning of an Indian gentleman driving in state escorted by a bodyguard of aristocratic ladies and gentlemen.

In Paris he was once invited by a Countess to her salon, where he noticed a Kashmir shawl used as a hanging on the wall. The Countess proudly drew the attention of the Prince to this decoration. A return invitation followed in due course. As the Countess and her friends took leave the Prince presented

each of them with an expensive Kashmir shawl.

It is believed that the important business which took the Prince to England was to try to negotiate with the British government for an *izara* (permanent lease) of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in supersession of the East India Company. He was well received by Queen Victoria. But this ambitious project of his came to nothing on account of his sudden death under somewhat mysterious circumstances.

### *Our House at Jorasanko*

Our house has had an interesting history. As I have already said, my forefathers migrated to Calcutta in the early days of the East India Company, and, having helped in the erection of Fort William, made enough money to construct a palatial building of their own at Jorasanko in the northern quarter of the town. Other gentry were attracted to this quarter which gradually became the most fashionable part of the city, with elegant houses vying with each other. It is a pity that most of these houses are being crowded out or demolished to make room for hideous modern mansions. The architecture of that period with high columned facades and a series of interior courtyards was not only dignified but most suited to the tropical climate.

After the death of the Prince, my grandfather, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, became the head of the family. Although for many years he lived away from the family residence in a separate house in Park Street, his commanding personality knit the numerous members of the family into a homogeneous body. They were also deeply influenced by his spiritual life. My second uncle Satyendranath, as an I.C.S. officer in the Bombay Presidency, had necessarily to live away from the family and on retirement chose to settle down at Ballygunge.

At Jorasanko lived the direct descendants of the Maharshi at No. 6, Dwarkanath Tagore Lane. It was a huge rambling house spread over an acre of ground with wide verandahs and large halls around the outer courtyard and a series of dark and dingy corridors and staircases and rooms, where no sunlight ever penetrated, which gave us the creeps whenever as children we had to pass through them. At No. 5, the handsome residence

opposite to ours, lived my three artist cousins Gaganendra, Samarendra and Abanindra.

### *My Uncles*

Our boyhood days were divided between these different surroundings. Each had its own characteristic contribution to make on our impressionable minds. At the Park Street house leaders of the Brahma Samaj and ardent devotees of other religious movements from every province of India were constantly to be found come to pay their respects to the Maharshi or to hold discourses on problems of philosophy and religion with him. With what awe we went into the room to take the dust of his feet and to be blest in return! Coming down the stairs we would with no less awe peep into the room where sat my eldest uncle Dwijendranath. But very often this awe would turn into amusement on hearing peals of loud laughter bursting from the doors of his room and shaking the whole house. His life was devoted exclusively to philosophical studies among which the most important of his contributions was a comparative study of the philosophy of Kant and the *Vedanta*. In worldly affairs he was like a child—quite unlike the Maharshi. In his early days he had written in his inimitable style an allegorical poem which has remained a classic in Bengali literature. But poetry was not his *métier*—his mind dwelt in the abstract region of the intellect. He used to work from early morning till late at night. When tired he had three alternative means of recreation—indulging in the solution of mathematical problems, constructing boxes with folded paper, or re-reading *Robinson Crusoe* or some novel by Sir Walter Scott. Many amusing stories were told of this naïve philosopher, whose Tolstoy-like figure could be seen every morning riding on a tricycle through the crowded and fashionable Park Street, serenely indifferent to the effect he created. To avoid the trouble of buttoning up he would always wear two coats, one in the normal manner and the other back to front. One day, unable to find any audience to hear an erudite lecture he had written for a learned gathering, he got an illiterate maid-servant to sit before him and listen to the long discourse on 'The Search after Truth'! Many of his friends and admirers would often patiently

sit with him waiting with an empty stomach for lunch or dinner to which they had been invited but which was never served for the simple reason that he had forgotten to order it. But perhaps most of them did not mind it, since they got more soul-satisfying food from Uncle Dwijendranath's brilliant talks interspersed with many a humorous anecdote and followed inevitably by peals of laughter. His was a rare personality, the product of an age which is perhaps lost for ever.

The world in which my second uncle Satyendranath's family lived, almost next door to that of my grandfather the Maharshi and my eldest uncle Dwijendranath, was of a quite different flavour. Aunt Jnanadanandini presided over the *Inga-Banga Samaj* consisting of English-educated Indians who had drifted away from their orthodox relatives and friends and formed a community of their own, settling down at Ballygunge with the European quarters of the city in close proximity. This, however, did not promote social relationship between the two. The Indian element was isolated both from its compatriots as well as from its rulers. Theirs was a small world but a very distinguished one. Although they had adopted the English mode of living and imbibed English ways of thinking, it need not be supposed that they were anti-national. As a matter of fact the national movement of the Congress owes its existence and support to the intellectuals belonging to this group—and what a galaxy of intellect and talent! The doors of my aunt's house were open to all members of this community.

The afternoons would start with tennis and tea and end with supper. I was too much of a child to gain much by contact with the people who frequented the house. My father owned a carriage drawn by an old piebald mare. Almost every afternoon we would drive to Park Street. On the return journey through the lonely streets late at night the rhythmic clatter of the hooves and the weird effect of light and shadow alternately cast by the gas lamps would at first cause my sensitive mind to imagine all sorts of fairy-tales. This, however, was followed by a deep slumber out of which my mother would shake me when the carriage turned into the all-too-familiar lane leading to our house.

*A Dinner Party*

Among the many persons who frequented my aunt's drawing-room may be mentioned the names of Taraknath Palit, S. P. Sinha, W. C. Bonnerjee, Krishna Govinda Gupta, Bihari Lal Gupta, Ashutosh Chaudhuri and his brothers, Manmohan Ghose, Lalmohan Ghose and Rashbehari Ghose. They were certainly the foremost leaders of intellectual Bengal towards the end of the last century. Taraknath will be remembered with gratitude in Bengal, along with Rashbehari, as the philanthropist who left all his fortune, earned during a brilliant career at the Bar of the High Court of Calcutta, for the promotion of scientific studies. The Indian National Congress must also have freely drawn from his largesse during his life-time. Father was attracted to Taraknath's son, Loken Palit who, after his education in Oxford, came back from England as an I.C.S. officer. Loken Palit had a genuine love for literature and especially for poetry. Father found in him a sincere admirer of his writings, one on whose critical judgment he could rely. The letters exchanged between Father and Loken Palit, some of which have been published, show the deep attachment between them.

Besides Taraknath, most of the other persons I have mentioned were top-rank lawyers. In those days there were very few openings for the educated young men—the most intelligent among them were drawn to the legal profession. They provided leadership to the political movement and laid the foundation of the Indian National Congress. But Father had little faith in their politics. He realized the futility of holding meetings and passing pious resolutions—the only programme the Congress had in its early years. After a session of the Congress held in Calcutta, Taraknath gave a dinner at his house to the political leaders assembled on the occasion. It was to be more or less a self-congratulatory party. Father, much to his surprise, was amongst those invited. He was loth to go to an English dinner in honour of the leaders of the Indian National Congress. Taraknath was, however, insistent as he wished Father to entertain the guests with a few songs. Father's resentment found voice in the words of the song he composed :

*Āmāy bolonā gāhite bolonā...*

Do not ask me to sing, I pray you  
ask me not.

Is this a mere matter of laugh and play,  
of merry making together  
and of falsehood and deceptions ?

He had hardly any time to set it to music. This he did while driving to Palit's house.

The appearance of Father dressed in *dhoti* and *chaddar* in the midst of the anglicised diners was in itself a protest. When, on the top of this, he poured out in the song his pent-up sorrow and resentment, there was an embarrassing hush, after which the party broke up.

### *Disconnected Memories*

Our stay in Calcutta did not last very long. My grandfather handed over the management of the family estate to my father when I was not yet eight years of age. Why he should have chosen his youngest son and one who was moreover a poet, is difficult to understand. The selection naturally aroused jealousies, especially because it carried an extra allowance. My father used to draw a monthly allowance of two hundred rupees from my grandfather as did the others who had families to maintain. To this was now added another hundred. How generous it seemed in those days but how ridiculous according to present standards ! A few disconnected memories of our life at Jorasanko before we left for Shelidah, the headquarters of our estates, still linger in some corner of my mind but these are connected more with Mother than with Father.

Father had his own study quite apart from the rooms which we occupied, and was either busy writing or meeting literary friends there. Once a week he would send for me and my sister and ask us to bring the clock before him. This particular clock was a precious heirloom. It was made to order for my great-grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath, by the famous McCabe. It took some years to finish, by which time the Prince had died. It took another year and a good deal of perseverance on the part of the clock-maker to find out the address of my grand-



father and to have it sent to him. If he had been less honest he need not have done so, since the Prince had paid fully in advance and nobody except the Prince knew about it. The Maharshi made a gift of it to Father, who would never allow anybody else to touch it. There was quite a ceremony when the clock needed winding and my sister and I felt proud to be invited on these occasions.

Amongst the many young poets and aspirants for literary fame who used to frequent Father's study was Chittaranjan Das. He had then just joined the Calcutta High Court Bar after returning from England. Politics had no attraction for him then; he wanted to be a poet. He would come directly from the court after long hours of waiting for a brief in the Bar Library and would run up the stairs two steps at a time shouting in his loud voice, 'Auntie, Auntie, where is my meat curry; I am famished, get it ready please.' He was a good eater, and my mother loved to feed him. He would always bring a note-book in his pocket and read out his latest effusions in verse. Father would sometimes throw cold water on his efforts but more often encouraged him by suggesting alterations.

Being of a sweet and affectionate nature, my mother was liked by all the members of the family. They came to her to be entertained and she shared in their happiness. They would also come to her when they were in any difficulty, and she shared their sorrows too. She bestowed her affection equally on everybody, but she had a specially soft corner for my cousin Balendra. He would not only read out to her his own writings but also the English and Sanskrit classics. Although my mother had had hardly any regular school education, she got quite familiar in this way with the best of Western and Eastern literature and even acquired a fair knowledge of the English and Sanskrit languages.

Cousin Balendra was also a favourite of Father's. Observing his artistic and literary tendencies, Father took him under his care and started to train him from an early age. To give them opportunities to develop their talents, Balendra and Sudhindra, another cousin with a literary bent of mind, were encouraged to contribute to the juvenile magazine called *Balak*. This magazine was short-lived, but, during the two years of its

existence, it certainly set a high standard of production. It is still considered not only a pioneer in juvenile journalism but unique in its kind. Later on both of these cousins were made to complete their apprenticeship by taking part in the editing of the *Sadhana*, a high-class literary journal founded by Father, and also by contributing to *Bharati*, started by my eldest uncle Dwijendranath.

I remember how Baludada—that is how I called Balendranath—would bring the essays which he had been enjoined to write and wait for Father's verdict on them. More often than not Father would ask him to rewrite them explaining to him how the subject-matter should be treated. When this had been done, Father would begin making corrections after discussing with him the construction of each sentence and the selection of more appropriate words wherever needed. Hardly any writing would be considered fit for the press until it had been rewritten four or five times. Baludada ungrudgingly submitted to this intensive and exacting course of training. As a result, he developed a style characterized by a lucid and logical treatment of the subject expressed in chaste diction. In his essays not a single sentence is redundant—not a single word can be replaced by a happier substitute. Baludada died young—one of the first victims in Bengal of Hindu-Moslem communal tension—while trying to defend his mother when the carriage in which they were driving was attacked. His death was due to the after-effects of a wound he received in the head. He left only one or two books of poems and a volume of prose, but they have a distinctive place in Bengali literature.

There is a flat terrace on the roof of the first floor of our house; it is so large that two tennis courts could easily be accommodated on it. This roof functioned as the social centre for the family. It provided a playground for the youngsters whose boisterous mirth could be heard there all day long. The elders, especially the women, would gather there towards the evening and sit upon a carpet made comfortable with bolsters on the central portion of the roof which was raised like a platform. In those days tea-drinking had not come into vogue, but my mother, who acted as the hostess, had various sweets and cold drinks to serve. The men would drop in later when it grew dark and the oil lamps had been lit. It would then

start getting interesting. Invariably there would be music. Our house was never without it ; at all hours could be heard singing in some part or other of the house. Not only were most members of the family accomplished singers with fine voices, but music was their life and soul. No more congenial atmosphere for music could be imagined than this open-air drawing-room where in summer the gentle south breeze brought comfort to the body and the moonlight made everything seem unearthly. Songs of love, songs devotional and those of grief and sorrow would be sung. There was no lack of good voices, but the one which my father specially cared to hear was my cousin Abhi's. She sang with the abandon and spontaneity of a bird intoxicated by the warmth of spring. She died very young and her sweet ringing voice never brought cheer to the house any more.

Father had discovered outside the family a remarkable voice in a sister of Chittaranjan Das. My mother made her come and stay with us. She was adopted as a member of the family and we called her Amaladidi. During the years she was with us Father used to compose tunes that would specially suit her voice. Whenever these songs, such songs as

*Chira-sakhā hé chhero nā...*

My friend ever, my life-long friend  
leave not me alone  
You are the only friend to lean upon  
in the fearsome wilderness of the world.

Or, *Eki ākulatā bhuvanē...*

What a yearning all the world-over,  
what restless stirring in the wind.

which were composed in the nineties, are sung nowadays my mind flashes back to those evenings on the roof and the striking figure of Amaladidi singing in her unfaltering soprano voice. She was not handsome, and her generously built body, of a height quite unusual in this country, gave her a commanding appearance. But as soon as one heard her sweet voice one forgot about her rather manly appearance.

*Anniversary of Brahma Samaj*

My grandfather celebrated the anniversary of the Brahma Samaj in a grand manner. Preparations for the celebration that took place on the 11th Magh (about the 24th January) took several weeks. The house would be in a turmoil. Every talent in the family had to make some contribution to the programme. My father would compose the songs to be sung on the occasion. New songs were written and set to music every year. Rehearsals would then begin. My cousin Nitindranath had charge of the decorations as long as he lived. The whole of the outer quadrangle had to be repaired, repainted and decorated—but special attention was given to the courtyard in which the meeting assembled. Each year my cousin invented a new style of decoration. On one occasion he wanted the pillars to look like moss-covered trunks of trees. But since moss could not be had in a place like Calcutta he sent fishermen to drag some ponds and bring in cartloads of the green slimy stuff so common in the stagnant pools in Bengal. With the help of this and water lilies he did indeed make the courtyard look very gay. He was so pleased with the effect that he sent for his artist cousin Abanindra. There existed a sort of rivalry between the two. And Nitindra wanted Abanindra to admit that his much-vaunted novel scheme of decoration was after all a success. When Abanindra came he nodded his head in approval but hastily went back home holding his nose. In his enthusiasm Nitindranath had not realized that the place stank of rotten fish. Nitindranath felt crestfallen but, undaunted, he got my grandfather to pay for gallons of lavender and eau-de-cologne to drown the evil smell before the guests arrived.

This anniversary of the Brahma Samaj, known as *Maghotsava* (because it comes in the month of Magh), was a social event to which the people of Calcutta looked forward with eagerness. Not only was the music, songs sung by a choir chosen with meticulous care, exceptionally good but the solemn chanting of the Vedic mantras and the sermon that followed were listened to with deep reverence. In the early days the Maharshi himself sat on the *Vedi* and gave the sermon. Later on it was invariably either Satyendranath or my father who delivered it.

As children we were more interested in the flowers, the

candle lights of the numerous chandeliers that lit the hall and the corridors and above all the remnants of the feast. Very often we would have our own celebration the next day before the decorations and lights were taken down.

### *Kham-Kheyali Sabha*

One of the lasting impressions of these early years was that of the Kham-Kheyali Sabha. Father and Cousin Balendranath were the moving spirits behind this queer and informal club. There was no constitution or any membership fixed by rules. Friends who fell in with the idea would invite the others by rotation to a dinner party. The number perhaps never exceeded twenty, but every kind of talent was represented—there were poets, writers, actors, musicians and others. The dinners were elaborate without any attempt at ostentation. The hosts made it a point to cater for the taste of the artist rather than for that of the gourmand. Therefore each of the dinner parties would have unique features which appealed not only to the palate but to the eye as well. I remember the occasion when Father had invited the club. The dinner was served on low tables around a raised platform on which one of my artist cousins had featured a vivid representation of the landscape and life of a Bengal village. Craftsmen from Krishnanagar had been requisitioned to erect miniature thatched cottages and to model types of Bengali men and women. Food was served on white marble plates and dishes ordered from Jaipur. The ingenuity and skill of my mother was taxed to its limit to invent novel preparations of food. Father's imagination would run riot on these occasions and he would suggest all sorts of strange dishes which had never been attempted before, and Mother had to rack her brains to achieve the impossible and yet make them into culinary successes. But the food was not the only enjoyable part of the programme. After dinner when the guests had comfortably seated themselves in the drawing-room, the real feast would begin with abundance of music and readings from poetry or short stories. One-act plays were often performed. But apart from such entertainments, what was most enjoyable was the brilliant and witty conversation that took place.

That is an art which has almost disappeared in the world of today.

When Father sang such songs as

*Āji mama mana chāhé...*

I long for my life-long friend today,  
for that constant companion of mine  
who remains by my side day and night  
in joy and in sorrow, in life and also in death.

Abanindra with his *esraj* and Maharaja Jagadindranath of Natore with the *pakhoaj* would accompany him. Father's voice was at its best during this period, and it was a treat to hear him sing. Those familiar with his later compositions which are essentially of a folk-music character would hardly realise how wonderful it was to hear him sing the *Dhrupad* in the classical *rag* setting accompanied by the *pakhoaj*. And how well and with what understanding the Maharaja played ! Father would sometimes put the Maharaja to the severest test by asking him to play the *pakhoaj* while he recited poems from *Sonār Tori* or from *Mānasi*.\*

Everyone had his own favourite songs, however, and Father would be requested to sing them again and again. Sir Jagadish Bose would never tire of listening to

*Esho ésho phiré ésho...*

Come back, come back my beloved,  
Come back to this craving heart  
athirst and afire with longing.

Father was writing the short stories of the *Galpaguchchha* series at this time. He would go off to Shelidah or to Potisar for a few days and bring back with him a story. The Kham-Kheyali group would eagerly wait to hear the latest he had written. I think the witty plays *Bini Paisār Bhoj* and *Baikunther Khātā* were written specially for the Kham-Kheyali Sabha. The latter was performed one evening at Gaganendranath's house with Father as Abinash, Gaganendra as Baikuntha, Samarendra as Kedar, Abanindra as Tincowrie and Chota Akshoy Babu as the old servant Ishan. It was rollicking fun with just that touch of pathos to relieve the humour and give

it a more abiding substance. Such a combination of consummate actors happened only once again when *Dāk Ghar* (*The Post Office*) was staged many years later at the Vichitra Club.

I can write about such details regarding the life and activities of grown-up people because, as I have mentioned before, I was of a timid and retiring nature and therefore did not seek companionship with children of my own age. I preferred to be with my elders and especially tagged along after cousins Balendra and Nitindra. They treated me as their particular pet and would take me wherever they went. Thus I grew bold and used to stay with them even when the elders discussed matters far beyond my understanding. The meetings of the Kham-Kheyali Club greatly attracted me. I would sneak into a corner of the room and make myself as inconspicuous as possible. It was in this way that my education started at a very early age, and love and respect for the higher things in art and literature were inculcated in me quite unconsciously.

Besides members of our family, the persons whom I used to see often at the Club were Jagadish Bose, the Maharaja of Natore, Akshoy Kumar Choudhury, Chota Akshoy Babu, Priyanath Sen, Chittaranjan Das, Pramathanath Roy Chaudhuri of Santosh, Pramatha Chaudhuri (who afterwards wrote under the pseudonym 'Birbal'), and some others whom I did not know at the time. Later on Atul Prasad Sen was introduced. His inexperienced youth and innocent appearance tempted the others to play practical jokes on him from the very first day. At that time he had no other accomplishment than that of being a briefless barrister. D. L. Roy frequently entertained the party with humorous songs sung in his inimitable style. The Kham-Kheyali Sabha came to an abrupt end when Father left Calcutta and went to live at Shelidah with his family.

### *Bengal Provincial Conference*

It was while we were still children and living at the Jorasanko house that there occurred the great earthquake of 1897. The panic created in Calcutta was bad enough since an earthquake of such intensity had not occurred within living memory, but it was worse in our house as all the men happened to be absent

on that day. The Bengal Provincial Conference was being held at Natore that year. The Maharaja, who was the host, being a particular friend of the family, had invited everybody and they had gone there. Our quarters on the second floor were badly damaged and we took shelter on the ground floor. For days there was no news from Natore as all communications had been cut off. My mother had been injured, and to this was added her anxiety for Father and others. At last when after a week they returned, they brought harrowing tales of their experiences at Natore, where the earth-tremors must have been very much worse than at Calcutta.

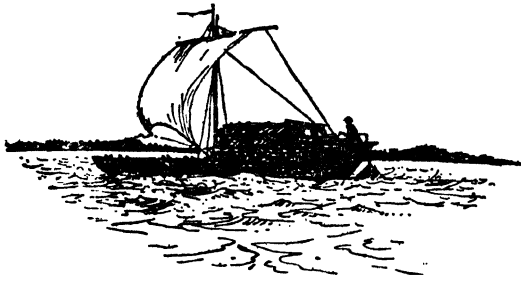
Long afterwards I heard from Father what happened at the Conference. There is one story worth repeating. In those days all the meetings of the Congress were conducted in English. Almost all those who led the national movement had been educated in England and had exceptional mastery over the English language. Such men as W. C. Bonnerjee, Pheroze Shah Mehta, G. K. Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjea, Rashbehari Ghose, Lalmohan Ghose, Anandamohan Bose were first-rate orators and their speeches in English were greatly admired. Father did not mind the speeches being given in English in the sessions of the Congress, but he wanted that at least in the Provincial Conferences the language used should be that of the province. Father, my uncle Satyendranath, the Maharaja of Natore and a few others had formed a group to move a resolution to this effect at the Natore Conference. There was stiff opposition from the leaders. Not one of them could make a speech in Bengali. In the end a compromise was effected when Father offered to give a running translation in Bengali of all the speeches made. On the opening day of the conference Father actually did this. It was a remarkable and most difficult performance. Before the meeting broke up—the conference could not meet again owing to the earthquake—W. C. Bonnerjee twitted Father by saying, ‘Rabi Babu, your Bengali was wonderful, but do you think that your *chashas* and *bhushas* (meaning peasants and the common people) understood your mellifluous language better than our English?’



*Congress Session 1896*

I have a very vague recollection of the session of the Congress held in Calcutta in the year 1896. In those days the city did not have many parks where such public functions could be held. The sanctity of the Maidan and the Eden Gardens was jealously guarded by the Government against any pollution from political demonstrations by the people of the country. So Beadon Square, which is close to our Jorasanko residence, was selected as the venue of the Congress. Nowadays the selection of such a site would be unthinkable—there are so many other more suitable places in elegant localities—but the Chitpur Road and Beadon Street crossing where the Congress was to be held had not yet fallen into disrepute.

Naturally there was great excitement in our house while preparations went on for the great event. Father took charge of the programme for music with Saraladidi to help him. For many years, as long as he kept contact with the public life of Calcutta, people depended on Father to arrange the music on all big occasions. Father chose Bankim Chandra's *Vande Mataram* as the opening song. He set music to the words of the poem and sang it himself, accompanied on the organ by Saraladidi. Father's voice had such carrying capacity that it could be heard from the farthest corner of the huge assembly and held the audience under a spell. Such an achievement must seem strange and impossible in these days of 'mikes' and loud speakers which have brought about a gradual deterioration in the volume of the voice. This undoubtedly was the first occasion when *Vande Mataram* was sung at a public gathering. The effect was so overpowering that the song immediately became recognized as the national song. I believe at no subsequent meeting of the Congress has *Vande Mataram* been left out. The slogan came into use at a much later date.



### *At Shelidah*

Shelidah lies on the northernmost border of Nadia, being separated from Pabna by the river Padma, which forms the natural boundary between the two districts. But after reaching the alluvial plains of Bengal, the Padma is no longer the dainty and well-mannered river that flows by the sacred cities of Allahabad and Banaras. It has gathered volume during its long journey and changed into a seething mass of muddy water, vast in extent and unruly in character. In spite of its size it has acquired a capricious nature, playing hide-and-seek with the innumerable villages along its banks. Just when some of those villages begin to feel secure and happy on receiving her caresses, she wantonly abandons them to distribute her favours on others miles away.

In those days Shelidah was snugly ensconced between the Padma and the Gorai, and this advantageous position gave the place for many years an added importance as a river-port. Boats of all descriptions called there to unload or replenish their cargo of paddy, jute, oilseeds, jaggery, and what not, the produce of the richest area in Bengal. Clumsy and heavy cargo-boats from Bihar would be seen there as well as the lightly-built and finely proportioned *panshies* from Dacca. But that which gave the most active interest to the river-life, was the fleet of fishing-boats that kept busy day and night catching *hilsa*, and transporting the catch to Calcutta from Kushtia, the nearest railway station.

At Shelidah we lived an entirely different life away from all contact with society and completely confined to ourselves. The change was in a way beneficial. Our family had grown, and we five children had better opportunities of getting to

know our parents intimately and living in closer contact with nature. My father became greatly concerned about our education. He knew very well the evil effects of the stereotyped school-teaching prevalent in our country, his own experience in a Normal School in Calcutta having left a bitter impression on his mind. It may be mentioned in passing that his first criticism of the prevalent system of education appeared in his article contributed to *Sadhana* as early as 1892. *Sikshār Herpher* (The Tortuosities of Education), as this essay was named, was a vigorous and reasoned plea for acceptance of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. It aroused considerable interest amongst educationists including Sir Gooroodas Banerjee, the first Indian Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta. Father was anxious that his own children should be spared such unhealthy and stifling influences, so he engaged teachers who lived with us. But the teachers had to be taught first. Father began to devise his own methods and to train the teachers to learn and follow them. Very often he would take the classes himself.

Our teacher of English was an Englishman of a rather interesting type. He was given a bungalow in the compound. There he lived with thousands of silk-worms in which he had become interested through Akshoy Kumar Maitra, the historian. On Sundays, discarding all clothes, Mr. Lawrence would wrap himself in old newspapers and lie amongst the caterpillars which delighted in crawling all over him. He was very fond of them and used to say they were his children.

We had lessons in English, Mathematics and Sanskrit from the teachers. Father would not leave Bengali to them, but taught it himself. At the time he was writing the poems of *Kathā-o-Kāhini*. He would take up one of the poems or some selected prose paragraph and explain it in great detail to my sister Bela and myself, paraphrasing and analyzing every sentence. For me, who had then a rather elementary knowledge of the language, these pieces would be quite difficult. But Father did not care in the least. He never used any of the usual graded readers such as are used in the schools. He liked to start us at once on good literature. He did not like to make children feel that because they were immature they must read only that kind of silly stuff written specially for children

by people who had little conception of their mental aptitude or capacity. He took such great pains to explain every word, repeating it several times, that by the end of the lesson the whole thing would be vividly impressed on our minds. It would then be easy to memorize the piece. In this way in a short time we could recite whole books of poems and descriptive pieces of prose from well-known writers. Grammar we never learnt—nor was it necessary. In English he would sometimes assign us passages from Amiel's *Journal*, one of his favourite books; in Sanskrit, the selections from the *Upanishads* contained in *Brahmo Dharma*. Some years later, he made me memorize the whole of the *Dhammapada* in Pali.

Father was very keen that we children should know the Indian classics well, especially the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In the old days children had their education in literature, social and moral ethics, and even philosophy and religion from a very early age through hearing stories told them by their grandmothers. Now they have to go to school as soon as they can walk and grandmothers are no longer well versed in the folk-lore and mythology of ancient India. The printed editions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are so bulky and contain such a mass of irrelevant matter that they are of no use to children. Even grown-ups find it difficult to wade through the volumes. Father set my mother to prepare an abridged version of the *Ramayana*, keeping to the original but leaving out all superfluous and irrelevant matter so that the main story could be read at a stretch. Father insisted that she should consult the original Sanskrit and not depend upon Bengali translations for preparing her text. This was difficult for Mother, but undaunted she read the *Ramayana* with the help of a Pandit, and only then did she start writing, but unfortunately the book was not finished before she died and the MS. of the portion she had written got lost. I remember with what avidity we used to read her MS.

At the same time Father induced my cousin Surendranath to prepare an abridged edition of the *Mahabharata*. Whenever he came to Shelidah he used to bring the MS. with him to consult Father. My sister Bela and I would not let him go until he had read to us all that he had written since his last visit. After Surendada had finished writing, Father took the

MS. with him to Santiniketan and entertained the pupils of the school there by reading out to them the story of the *Mahabharata* every evening. I was then (in 1903) preparing for the Matric (then called the Entrance) examination. Father sat with the boys in the verandah of the library, while my friend Santosh and I were closeted with our Sanskrit tutor, Haricharan Banerji, in a room in the same building vainly trying to understand difficult passages of Bhartrihari. Realizing that our whole attention was elsewhere, Hari-babu complained to Father that it was useless to expect the two boys to pass their examination as long as the reading of the *Mahabharata* went on. Father smiled and said, 'If you will allow them to attend my class they will know their *Mahabharata* well at least.' From that day there was no more cramming in the evenings and much to the surprise of our teachers we managed to pass the examination. The first edition of Surendada's *Mahabharata* contained the whole of what he had condensed from the text of Kaliprasanna Sinha. Considering it too bulky, Father published a still further abridged edition under the name of *Kuru-Pandava*.

Whilst Father looked after our academic education, Mother had her own way of giving us training in the practical affairs of life. Every Sunday she gave leave to the servants. My sister and I were directed by her to do all the household duties. My younger sisters were too young to take part in the work. It was great fun; what interested me was the cooking. Is it not incumbent on the cook to taste each dish as soon as prepared? A giant of a Sikh turned up one day and asked for employment. He was appointed *durwan* or gatekeeper. A few days later, he came to Mother and complained that he was not getting enough to eat. Mother asked him what he would like to eat. He wanted only some *chapatis* with *dal* and *dahi*, he meekly replied, and then added in an even meeker voice, 'May I have them in sufficient quantities?' We were told to get these ready and see how much would satisfy him. Heaps of *chapatis* were prepared and several pots of *dahi*. Mother watched as the man started gulping down whatever was served him. He must have consumed half a maund of food before he stopped. Next day Mother asked my Father to give the *durwan* a rise in his pay.

*Visitors at Shelidah*

During our stay at Shelidah we used to have visitors quite frequently. Dwijendralal Roy—better known as D. L. Roy—was magistrate at Kushtia, our Sub-divisional headquarters. Whenever he could get away from his official work he would come to our place. I happen to remember an amusing incident in connection with one of his visits. Perhaps few persons know that D. L. Roy—the poet and dramatist—began his career as a trained agriculturist. In a spurt of enthusiasm the Government sent four students to Cirencester College in England to study the science of agriculture. D. L. Roy was one of the four. When the four scholars returned with their specialized knowledge, the Government did not know what to do with them as a department for agriculture had yet to be organized. Some official high up in the ranks had a brain-wave, and all four of them were appointed Deputy Magistrates. When D. L. Roy used to visit us at Shelidah, years of administrative drudgery must have made his knowledge of agriculture somewhat rusty. But seeing that Father was laying out an extensive garden he became enthusiastic and suggested the planting of potatoes in a plot. At that time the cultivation of potatoes was almost unknown in Bengal. Father had a plot made ready and waited for instructions. These came in due course along with some seeds. The directions were meticulously followed, ignoring the protests of the gardener, an experienced farmer. The harvest however was no more than the weight of the seeds planted. Father was careful never again to seek agricultural advice from his friend. He would rather hear him sing and recite poems.

Jagdish Chandra Bose used to pay regular visits, specially in the winter, when we moved from the house to live in house-boats on the river. During the dry season the Padma shrinks to a comparatively narrow stream, and wide sand-banks are formed stretching for miles and miles. The sand is very clean and dazzlingly white. Wandering over the undulating dunes one would suddenly be agreeably surprised to find a crystal clear lake or a meandering offshoot of the river inhabited by thousands of wild duck, or a coppice of stunted casuarinas—the favourite haunt of wild boars and jackals. A lonely spot

on one of these sand-banks would be chosen, and a fleet of house-boats, country-boats, green-boats—a collection of all sorts of river craft would take us over there. On the bank would be erected a cluster of bamboo huts to accommodate the retinue of servants and, what we children used to like most, the temporary bath-house jutting right out into the river. Here we would camp for the dry months of the winter until the beginning of the summer, when the heat and the fury of the nor'westers would drive us back home.

Jagadish Chandra Bose loved to spend the week-ends with us on the river. He had travelled far and wide, but he used to say that no health or pleasure resort in the world could rival the *chars* of the Padma. He taught me how to trace the foot-prints of the turtles and discover the eggs that were carefully hidden under the sand. I had to bring him a bagful of eggs every day for his breakfast. He would be more delighted still when a live turtle was caught, for he relished the tender meat. These creatures take great pains to hide their eggs from the jackals but what they cannot efface are their own foot-prints which show clearly on the smooth sands. It was very interesting for me to follow the trail of parallel prints running like railway-lines, and not to be confused at the crossing where other mother turtles had fouled the track. Sometimes I would surprise one of these slow-moving animals quite helpless on the dry land far from the river. It was a simple thing to capture it. One had only to turn it on its back. Jagadish Chandra Bose had another hobby : he would make all of us dig pits in the sand and with wet towels round our heads lie down in them to sun-bathe, and then when the roasting process had gone far enough jump into the cool water for a change.

Jagadish Chandra Bose had a wonderful fund of interesting stories, some very amusing, of the many lands he had visited and personalities he had met. He could go on telling them for hours and days together, yet one would never get tired of listening to him for he could always make the most trivial facts interesting, and his humour was so refreshing. He could also laugh ; so few people can laugh well and at the proper time and place. I would greatly miss him when he went away and secretly I would take a vow to become a scientist like him when I grew up.

Jagadish Chandra was at this time making experiments to compare the reactions on the Living and Non-living to different kinds of stimuli. He believed the results he had obtained with the help of the delicate instruments he had invented would revolutionize the current conceptions held by scientists regarding the nature of life. He had received great encouragement from Sister Nivedita in pursuing this line of research. Father was also much interested. When Jagadish was satisfied that he had obtained sufficient convincing data to acquaint the scientific world of his discoveries he wanted to go to England to give actual demonstrations of his experiments to scientists in order to convince them of the truth of his deductions. Father approached the Maharaja of Tripura and was able to get from him sufficient money not only to enable Jagadish to go abroad but to fit up his laboratory with the equipment that he badly needed.

The attachment of the scientist and the poet was much more than just friendship. They would constantly exchange ideas. One would talk of the next story to be written and the other of the remarkable results obtained from experiments carried on in his laboratory. They would not only appreciate each other's criticisms but derive inspiration from their discussions. Every week-end that Jagadish came to Shelidah he would make Father read out to him the short story that he had written the previous week and get a promise from him to have another ready the next week-end. It was not only the necessity of filling the pages of *Sādhanā* or *Bhārati* but this constant demand from his friend that made Father write so many short stories at this period. Quite often he would not have sufficient time to finish a story. Some of the stories in the *Galpaguchchha* bear evidence of having been hurriedly written.

Besides Jagadish Bose and Dwijendralal Roy, Father had other occasional guests. The historian Akshoy Kumar Maitra was one of them. He was a lawyer in Rajshahi—but his chief interest was historical research, especially that of Bengal. He had collected a number of images and other relics of ancient times that helped to throw much light on the history of the province. This collection formed the nucleus of the Museum of the Varendra Anusandhan Samiti founded by him later on. But the claims of his profession and his scholarship were



overshadowed by his enthusiasm for a peculiar hobby—that of silk-worm rearing. Whenever he came to Shelidah he would bring some silk-worm eggs and give lessons on how to rear the insects and produce silk yarn. Mr. Lawrence, who was initiated in this hobby by him, produced such a huge quantity of silk by the end of the year that Maitra was glad to acknowledge him a worthy pupil. Akshoy Maitra could talk on many subjects with authority but without pedantry and Father therefore enjoyed the days of his stay spent in pleasant discussions on many subjects of mutual interest.

Whenever Amaladidi was with us Father's passion for music would be roused. The whole day he would be humming tunes and Amaladidi would sit with him to pick up the music of the newly composed songs. Our Indian tradition has always been to learn music by ear and not by reading notations. We others would wait expectantly for the evening. After a hurried dinner the whole family would tumble into an open boat and, rowing out into the middle of the river, keep it anchored there. Amaladidi and Father would take turns and song after song would float across the water uninterruptedly until midnight. I would, of course, often be lulled to sleep on my mother's lap long before the party broke up. The river would be deserted and there would be nothing to disturb the stillness of the night except the gurgling of the eddies as they rushed past the boat. The moon would shine like silver over patches of water ruffled by the wind and occasionally belated fishing boats would be silhouetted against the light as they glided down on the current. Such songs as

*Belā gelo tomār patha cheyé<sup>1</sup>*

Or

*Sandhyara meghamālā<sup>2</sup>*

still remind me of those nights when the haunting tunes of the songs would blend with the rippling of the water, the rustling of the soft breeze, the rhythmic splashing of the oars of passing boats and the moonlight flooding the expanse of the river and its banks with an ethereal beauty. A more romantic setting for music cannot be imagined.

<sup>1</sup> My day passes awaiting Thee

<sup>2</sup> Thou wreath of evening clouds

With the arrival of Maharaja Jagadindranath of Natore our rustic camp on the sands of the river-bank took on a lively appearance. His talent as a writer and musician is well-known. But what we liked about him most was his genial personality, his fund of humour and delicate appreciation of others whatever they might be worth. While Father would be entertaining the Maharaja, Mother with the help of Amaladidi, who was an expert in the cooking of East Bengal delicacies, would be busy preparing the meals. Father knew that the Maharaja was a connoisseur in the matter of food and she was determined to satisfy his palate. I believe Natore enjoyed his week-ends at Shelidah just as much as we enjoyed his company.

#### *Father's Literary Output*

Father's output of writing was perhaps at its maximum during the years at Shelidah. He composed poems and songs, wrote short stories, essays and lectures—working hard all day long and sometimes till late into the night. When he worked hardest he ate very little. While Mother would get annoyed over this, she knew very well that nothing could dissuade him, once he had made up his mind. My cousin, Sarala Devi, was then editing the literary journal *Bharati*. This journal had been started by my eldest uncle, Dwijendranath, and the editorship had remained confined to the members of the family. Father had also served his term at one period. Saraladidi had asked father to write a short drama for the journal. He had been putting it off, not feeling in the mood to write a drama. Knowing him as she did, Saraladidi advertised that the first instalment of a light drama by the Poet Rabindranath would be published in the next issue of *Bharati*. After a few days she wrote to Father informing him that she had to do this in order to stimulate the flagging interest of the public in the journal, and begged him not to let her down. Father was furious at first; but the next day he told Mother not to disturb him for meals, but to send him occasionally glasses of liquid refreshment, as he would be busy writing. He shut himself up for three days in his room, and wrote without break on a fast-ing diet. By the end of the third day he had finished that witty drama *Chirakumar Sabha* (Bachelors' Club). Not trusting the

MS. to the post he himself hurried off to Calcutta with it. Mother knew, however, that it was not the urgency of handing it over to the journal in time for publication that made him depart so suddenly. As soon as he had finished a piece of writing, Father always got restless until he had an opportunity of reading it to a few friends. None of his literary friends was at Shelidah at the time, so off he must go to Calcutta. He was in such a weak condition after the fasting and the strain of writing that he fainted going up the stairs in the Jorasanko house. That gave Mother an excuse to make him go back to normal diet.

### *His Managerial Work*

In spite of the heavy literary work Father did not neglect his managerial duties. Every morning he would go through the accounts, hear reports from the staff, and dispose of important correspondence. But the most interesting function for him was to meet the tenants, hear their complaints and settle disputes. He did not treat them in the traditional manner. He talked with them freely and they too felt so much at ease with him that they would tell him about their land, their families, and their personal affairs. Father had made known that any tenant who wanted to see him could go straight to him; no officer was to interfere with this inherent right of the tenant. Thus was established a bond of love and respect between the landlord and the tenants, a tradition that lasted in our estates till the end.

In the office he was a hard taskmaster. The officers knew that no negligence in their duties would escape his notice—nor would he be satisfied with their notes and recommendations. He read through every file, mastered all the details of the case and gave his own judgment or passed orders independently. The Government after some time came to recognize that no injustice would be done in our estates, and allowed liberties that were not enjoyed by other *zamindars*. Father told the tenants not to go to any of the courts. They had their *panchayats*, who would settle all disputes and even criminal cases. If they were not satisfied there, the five *pradhāns* for the whole *parganā* would hear their appeal. The landlord himself constituted the

final court of appeal. This system prevailed for many years and not a single tenant ever filed a suit in the magisterial or munsiff courts nor did the Government ever object to the legal powers assumed by us. In one of the estates a complete system of self-government was introduced by Father, and it worked wonderfully well. Was not the Maharshi right in putting his youngest son in charge of the estates, even if he was a poet and a visionary ?

In looking after the estates, Father had constantly to tour through many districts of rural Bengal since our properties were spread over Nadia, Pabna, Faridpur, Rajshahi, Bogra and even Cuttack in Orissa. He particularly enjoyed travelling in boats through the network of small rivers which wind their way through the heart of the province. No other way of travelling gives such opportunities of observing the life of the people. Bengal is full of rivers, and our people are truly fond of them. These rivers are like the bullock cart tracts, going as the fancy takes them, bending twisting and sometimes doubling on their tracks, they meander past the populous villages that cling to their banks and wander at leisure through the fields of paddy, jute, sugarcane, mustard and the various other crops that grow abundantly, bringing the silt from afar spilling it generously over the fields of this deltaic land. Sitting idly in the boat one never gets tired of watching through the windows the scenes of domestic life that reveal themselves in endless variety. Groups of women with their earthen-pots poised gracefully on their hips coming down the *ghats* ; children swimming boisterously, splashing water at each other ; fishermen with their innumerable ingenious devices engaged in trapping fish, peasants loading their harvest on to boats till the brims almost touch the level of the water ; a king-fisher perched motionless on the tip of a hanging bamboo, ready to swoop down at the sight of its prey—a life of toil, tranquillity and happiness going on for ages unchanging and unspoiled.

### *A Business Venture*

The town of Kushtia, the nearest railway station to Shelidah, a distance of five miles by a *kutchra* road and a ferry crossing over the river Gorai, was fast growing into a trading centre

for the northern portion of the district of Nadia. We had some land there which had commercial advantages, being quite close to the railway station as well as to the river. Cousins Balendra and Surendra were eager to launch into business and induced Father to form a private company, which was eventually registered as Tagore & Co. with the three as partners. A house and some godowns were built facing the Kushtia station and business started at first in the storage of grain and then in the baling of jute. As profits began to come in, the temptation to expand the business grew irresistible. Behind all their artistic, literary and creative faculties, there lurked in the Tagores a speculative tendency, perhaps an inheritance from Prince Dwarkanath.

The peasants had found sugarcane a good money-crop, and its cultivation had extended a good deal. But there was the difficulty of crushing it. In Bengal this crop is not grown in the plantation system but in scattered plots; so that factories cannot be established. The primitive system of crushing was too uneconomic. Somebody had invented a portable machine with cylinders driven by bullocks. An Englishman named Renwick had many of these machines made and established a business with headquarters at Kushtia by renting these machines out to the cultivators for the season. Tagore & Co. took up this business also. Keen was the competition for some years. The business would probably have flourished but for the dishonesty of the manager. As a result, when the company of the Tagores was wound up, Father found himself heavily in debt as he took the entire liability on his own shoulders. Thus ended father's one and only adventure in business.

#### *A Dramatic Episode*

One of the visits to Shelidah during my boyhood has left a lasting impression on my mind through its association with a dramatic episode which took place while we were spending a fortnight in a house-boat on the river Gorai.

It was the month of October, somewhere in the nineties, when I was barely nine years of age. Father had taken me with him on the boat, and although it was too early in the season, we were cruising about looking for a suitable dry sand-bank, Father

was then editing the Bengali monthly *Sādhanā*, the major portion of which he had to fill with his own writings. Almost every issue carried a story. These were later on published in collected form as *Galpaguchchha*. Most of these stories contain vivid and intimate descriptions of the day-to-day life of the common people living in the villages of Bengal. And among such villages Shelidah holds a distinctive place, because it was here that father came into close contact with the children of the soil and gathered his intimate knowledge of their joys and sorrows.

He would spend the whole day in the front cabin writing. My time would be spent just as quietly in the adjoining cabin, gazing with fascinated eyes at the ever-changing life on the river. After sunset Father would take me up on deck and entertain me as best as he could. One evening as we were sitting on chairs placed close to the railing, Father's slippers fell into the water. They were well-worn and should have been discarded long ago. Without a moment's hesitation he dived into the river and swam after them, fighting with the swift currents. The rest of the evening was happily spent with the pair of salvaged slippers, now rendered quite useless, drying in front of him.

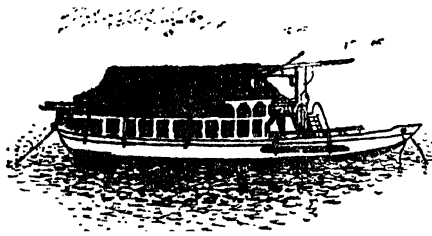
But we were not destined to enjoy this idyllic life for long. Without warning the clouds darkened the sky one morning and a cyclone began to blow. Our boat had to take refuge in a sort of bay, formed, as so often, by indentations of the banks and known to the fishermen as *dah*. Into this *dah*, where neither the current nor the waves could enter through its narrow bottle neck, had crowded hundreds of river-craft. The storm raged for three days. From our safe refuge we were the helpless witnesses of the cruel devastation that took place on the river and in villages on its banks. Wreckage of every description—sinking boats, uprooted trees, roofs of houses—were swept along the current in an unending procession.

On the afternoon of the third day, when the storm had somewhat abated but the waves on the river were still running high, we went up on the top deck to stretch our limbs and get a good view of the weird scene. Suddenly Father cried out that there was a body floating down the middle of the river. Looking carefully where he pointed, one could see nothing but a mass of dark hair in the water, rising and falling with the movement of the waves.

Father immediately ordered the men to take the life-boat to the drowning person—undoubtedly a woman. The boatmen said it would be foolhardy to venture out in such a storm. Father got annoyed and jumped into the life-boat himself. Still they tarried, until our old Mahommedan cook roundly abused them for being cowards and rushed to help father. Thoroughly ashamed of themselves, they now followed him into the boat and tried to redeem their cowardly conduct by compelling Father to remain behind while they sallied forth. It was thrilling to watch the frail little boat being rowed across the boisterous waves, the men pulling heftily for all they were worth, led by the encouraging gesticulations of the cook, who had assumed command.

In the meantime the body had been carried a long distance, and it was quite dark when the rescue-party returned with the woman. The cook told Father that when the boat came alongside and one of the men catching hold of her tried to drag her in—the woman repeatedly beseeched them to let go. She was far from drowning; being an expert swimmer she found it difficult to get rid of herself that way. She would not give her name. But Father soon discovered that she was the wife of one of our tenants—a handsome woman with little reason to be tired of her young life.

The husband was sent for, and after Father had spoken to him, not only did he take his wife home but—so goes the story—never again did he give her cause to feel unhappy.



### *The Boat Padma*

Father loved the river Padma, as most of his readers know from the poems he has written in praise of its grandeur and beauty. It is no wonder that he named his favourite house-boat after this river. Although it was he who first gave it a name, the house-boat could claim an older association with our family. It was most certainly built by Prince Dwarkanath and remained moored on the banks of the Hooghly near Calcutta during his life-time and that of my grandfather, Maharshi Devendranath. It is more than likely that the message of the death of the Prince was brought by fast couriers to the Maharshi, while he was on a pleasure cruise in this very boat. We have also on record that my grandfather travelled up and down the Ganges in this house-boat, often as far up as Banaras, and that one of these trips was taken during the troublesome days of the Mutiny.

Before the age of steam engines the rivers, rather than the roads, were the natural means of communication in our country, especially in Bengal. The well-to-do had to keep a fleet of river craft of all kinds for their use, of which house-boats with comfortably furnished cabins formed an essential part. They were used mainly for long-distance journeys but often also for pleasure trips. The boats were of peculiar construction, only to be found in Bengal. With a wide beam affording ample accommodation and flat-bottomed, they were heavy and slow of movement but well-suited to negotiate the shallow and uncertain rivers of this province. Dacca made a business of building these boats, which are therefore commonly known as *Daccal bajrahs*. Zemindars used to take great pride in them and vied with each other in their construction, though today they have no more use for them and rarely are they to be seen now.



This boat *Padma* was cherished by Father as one of his most prized possessions. During his youth, when he was completely absorbed in his own self and his own creative work and avoided society, this boat gave him the solitude that he needed. His work of managing the extensive Tagore estates afforded him greater opportunities of spending most of his time on the boat, travelling on inspection from one district to another, and even outside the province to villages in Orissa. Nothing could have been more congenial to him and he made good use of the boat until his middle age, when other interests took him away to entirely different surroundings. He was thereafter obliged to stay at Santiniketan; the institution he had founded there claimed all his attention. During the first few years of his stay there, it was not unusual for him to leave his work suddenly and go off to Shelidah and the boat. His letters show what an amount of solace he derived from these holidays, snatched from a life full of worries and anxieties at Santiniketan and Calcutta.

That the two phases of his life—the solitary artist and recluse of the youthful years, trying to probe into the depths of his being to find the talisman that would touch with magic and inspire with a meaning all his creative efforts, and the mature man living a life of multifarious activities, sharing his thoughts and work with his fellow-beings—should be associated with two entirely different surroundings is significant. But there is no doubt that his first and deepest love was for the country of mellow green fields with their clusters of bamboo shoots swaying gently in the south breeze and hiding villages in their midst, of majestic rivers with their stretches of gleaming white sand—the haunts of myriads of wild ducks, as well as of homely rivulets with sweet-sounding names, meandering in and out through peaceful villages hugging their banks. Such associations had entered deeper into his life than the parched and barren wastes that surrounded him at Santiniketan, the choice of his later years. The river *Padma* and its sandbanks, Shelidah and its fishermen and minstrels and its fields of golden yellow mustard blossoms, the house-boat with its plucky boatman, Tapsi, and its grey-bearded cook, Phatik, must have haunted him in his old age and made him feel homesick for all that he missed at Santiniketan.

In spite of Mother's misgivings Father started taking me with him on his frequent river journeys when I was little more than a boy of seven. I have therefore some knowledge of how he lived on the boat, when he used to retire to this favourite retreat of his. I have also shared with him on the river many an adventure and interesting experience. One such incident I have already described elsewhere. But now I am mainly concerned with the house-boat and its association with the literary life of Father.

The headquarters of the three estates at Shelidah, Shahjadpur and Potisar, and the factory at Kushtia, connected as they are by navigable rivers, gave my father sufficient excuse to adopt a roving life in a boat. My earliest recollection is that of a visit to Kushtia. The railway station which hangs precariously over the steep embankment of the Gorai and its one-legged English stationmaster, the river with its swift current and eddies, the innumerable barges and dinghies huddled close to the bank—all seemed strange and forbidding to me. But once we stepped into our boat, the homelike cosy interior comforted me. After a frugal meal consisting mainly of *hilsa* fish, Father at once settled down to write, while I watched with the intense curiosity of a child the restless movements of the innumerable insects that kept hovering over the water and the thousand and one interesting sights to be observed on the riverside of a busy locality. The factory was inspected in due course—its workshop with its huge hydraulic presses for baling jute, the innumerable sugarcane crushers waiting for shipment to interior villages, its warehouses bulging with their loads of mustard and other oil seeds, and the hundreds of workmen sweating and shouting. Father looked into all the details of the business but it did not take him long to do it; he had a way of easily shaking off the officers who came with long reports and accounts. Business finished, he would immediately go back to his writing as though the interruption mattered not at all. Only after sunset would he allow himself any rest. He would then take me with him to sit on the deck. Of what he talked to me, I have, of course, no recollection now. But most often we would sit quietly and watch the fishing boats glide silently along with the current, silhouetted against the soft glow of the sunset colours until the stars came out one by one and the night

advanced with stealthy steps enveloping everything with mystery. The venerable Phatik would then appear and break the silence with his stentorian voice announcing dinner—a ceaseless monotony of chicken cutlets and bread-pudding. My eyes would get heavy even before the last morsels had been gulped down but Father would sit till late reading or writing. He always carried a library of books with him. I can vaguely recollect treatises on ethnology, anthropology and other sciences, comparative grammars of the Indo-Aryan languages, Sanskrit classics and books of travels, but hardly ever any light literature either in Bengali or English. There might have been also the latest books on the history of English Literature and Criticism, and translations from French and Russian literature.

When he arrived at any of the estate headquarters, the routine would not be much altered except that the mornings would be given over to conference with the officers and the hearing of endless petitions from tenants. What with the firing of guns by quaintly dressed guards, and the blowing of conchshells by veiled women, the arrival at any of these places was somewhat spectacular and reminded one of the Middle Ages. If the visit happened to coincide with the *Punyāha* day, a procession would be formed and Father would be taken in a palanquin to the office building, in front of which a *shamiana* would be put up to shelter the crowd gathered for the occasion. The zemindar on such occasions has to sit on a raised platform, so that everybody can see him. After some ceremonials, the tenants one by one—the elders and the headmen of the villages first and then the commoners—would be conducted to him, the *nazarana* (payment of the first instalment of rent, generally a token payment only) paid, and blessings received with bowed heads. While this quaint ceremony was going on hurried preparations would be made for the feast which would follow. The tenants themselves made all the arrangements and saw to it that the precedents which social etiquette demanded were strictly followed. Since several thousands had to be served, the fare was very simple, consisting mainly of parched rice and sour milk. It was a pleasure to see the enjoyment they derived from such a feast.

The river Padma is so broad, the currents are so dangerous, and the sudden storms strike it with such fury that risky ad-

ventures are not rare with those who live on its bank. Father had his full share of them. He was a good swimmer. I have seen him swim across the Gorai with ease. He taught me how to swim by throwing me one day into the river from the deck of the boat. It was unnecessary to repeat the lesson the next day. Father enjoyed taking risks where others would hesitate. Many a time the old manager at Shelidah would come with folded palms beseeching him not to sail across the Padma in such bad weather. But once Father had made up his mind it was useless to try and dissuade him. When, however, it concerned the safety of others he would easily get nervous and fret.

It is not easy for me to say which of the poems and songs Father had composed or the stories and essays he had written while living on the house-boat *Padma*. Perhaps some day an industrious student of his literature will find out and give us this information. It may, however, be safely conjectured that the major portion of his literary productions up to the beginning of the century was written on this boat. It was while cruising leisurely through the many rivers of Nadia, Faridpur, Pabna and Rajshahi, that his keen sense of observation gave him the deep and intimate understanding of the life and landscape of rural Bengal, which permeates all his writings.

The boat *Padma* served my father well. It gave him peace and shelter when the world harassed him. It offered him adventure when he needed it. It took him into the heart of the country and gave him materials for his writing. And above all it gave him abundant pleasure.



### *A Trip to the Himalayas*

Sister Nivedita had become enthusiastic over places of pilgrimage in India—specially those in the remote mountains. Those who have read her book, *The Web of Indian Life*, may recall the idealized description of pilgrimages which she has given in the book. Being a super-active person, she was not content with merely writing but immediately thought of organizing groups of young men to visit some of these places, as an essential part of their education. When Father heard from Sister Nivedita that one of the monks from Belur Math—Sadananda Swami—was going to lead one such group to the shrine of Kedarnath in the Western Himalayas, he made up his mind to send me along with them. Father thought that this sort of a hiking trip would be a good preliminary training for the life of hardship he intended me to take up, as a pupil of Brahmacharya Asrama at Santiniketan. I wonder how many parents even today would let a boy of such immature age risk a journey on foot trekking through the Himalayas two hundred miles to a snow-capped peak 13,000 ft. high.

There was no time to waste. The outfit would have to be simple—a pair of ochre-coloured dhoties and kurtas, a set of warm underwear, a coat, two blankets; and a pair of ammunition boots. Provided with these and one hundred rupees we started one evening from Howrah in a third-class railway carriage. I found myself in a strangely assorted company. Besides my cousin Dinendra there were a few would-be *Sannyasins*, one or two spoilt scions of the rich and the sons of some shopkeepers. I was the youngest in the party, the others were much older. My heart sank within me. But Swamiji soon took me under his wing. When I found that beneath his austere yellow

robes he was very human and full of humour, I took courage. Among his disciples were Amulya Maharaj and a son of Mahendra Babu, the writer of the sayings of Ramakrishna. Amulya Maharaj took care of me like an elder brother. I had great respect for him. As Swami Sankarananda he is now the President of the Ramakrishna Mission. We started to walk from Kathgodam, the last railway station on the border of the Kumaon hills. Beginning with easy stages of five to eight miles, we very soon settled down to a steady twenty miles a day. It was too much for some of the town-bred young men, and Swamiji got rid of them at Nainital. A compact group of about ten of us remained. It took us little over a month to cover the four hundred miles to Kedarnath on the border of Tibet and back. What a variety of experiences! What enchanting scenes of beauty were unfolded before our eyes every day! What hardships were borne with a stoicism worthy of seasoned mountaineers, what miseries observed amongst the countless pilgrims struggling to go higher and higher up the hazardous path! We mingled with a continuous stream of pilgrims who came from the sandy desertland of the Punjab, from the cocoanut groves of Malabar, from the soft green fields of Bengal, from every part of India. They included youngsters hardly out of their teens, white-haired elders retired from all worldly affairs, newly-wed brides and wrinkled old widows—men, women and children of all description, old and young. They were dressed in a hundred different garbs,—the gay colours of the Rajput women, the magnificent turbans of the Punjabi army-officers, intermingling with the simple white *dhoti* and *sari* of the Bengalees, the ample folds of the dust-coloured skirts worn by the women of Agra and neighbouring districts, the long yellow robes of the *Sannyasins* and the almost nude bodies smeared with ashes and ochre paint of the different sects of Sadhus. Over two hundred miles of stony path fringing the holy river as it wound its rough way through Himalayan mountains, the way-worn pilgrims marched. The wide valleys, hot and dusty, where grew apricots and pomegranates, gradually gave way to forest glades scented with the resinous gum of the deodars. The road climbs higher and higher, until from a dizzy height the river is seen encircling the feet of the hills, silvery like the anklets of a dancing girl. Down in the gorge a precarious crossing is provided by a hang-

ing bridge of ropes over the rushing torrent leaping over boulders as big as houses. Crossing a wide plateau, a flat prairie of reeds and grasses with solitary mango-trees to mark the way, the pilgrims reach Karnaprayag, where the river divides itself in two—the turbulent Alakananda noisily following the wider valley on its upward course to the glaciers of Badrinath and the delicate blue-green Mandakini (Heavenly stream), true to its name, rising rapidly through narrow gorges, cut into deeply wooded slopes of the mountain-chain that leads to the ice-fields of Kedarnath.

Sitting in a circle under a spreading walnut tree, where the limpid waters of the maidenly Mandakini disdain to mingle their virgin purity with the muddy Alakananda, the women light fires and bake *chapatis*. Their hands keep time with the lilting tune of the song composed for the occasion:

*Kedarnathke charana-kamalame prana hamara atake*<sup>1</sup>

Steeper and steeper the path winds its way upwards. It is hardly a path—a narrow wedge-shaped passage cut into the rock rising almost perpendicular from the bottom, thousands of feet below. The feet get swollen and bruised by the sharp pointed flints. Only a few steps can be taken at a time; breathing becomes difficult. Pain and misery are stamped on the face of everyone. I hear a heart-rending cry behind me. Turning round I see a decrepit beggar, almost in the last stages of exhaustion, bemoaning the loss of the only bit of rag which he had managed to wind round his blood-stained feet. As he saw my pitying look, he cried out:

‘Don’t look like that! This is a small matter. I shall not be left behind. My Kedarnath is calling me;—who will stand in my way? *Jai Kedar Ki Jai!*

<sup>1</sup> To the lotus feet of Kedarnath my soul holds fast.



### *Early Days at Santiniketan*

It is against the nature of a genius to be content with a monotonous existence or be satisfied with a single purpose in life. Father was no exception. Throughout his life he would constantly want to change his living quarters, his surroundings, his food and his clothes and, what mattered most, he needed fresh fields to give scope to his active and creative mind. It was no wonder that Shelidah could not hold him for very long. His next move was to Santiniketan. He had become restless and was eager to find a congenial place where he could experiment with his ideas about education. What could better fulfil the dream he had long cherished in his mind of the ideal atmosphere and surroundings for children than what Santiniketan seemed to offer ?

My earliest recollection of the Santiniketan Asrama goes back to my childhood when I was only nine years of age. About this time my cousin Balendranath had grown enthusiastic over the idea of forming an All-India Theistic Society by the fusion of the three Brahmo Samajes of Bengal, the Arya Samaj of the Punjab and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay. He had just then returned home after a tour in the course of which he had met the leaders of these religious societies and discussed with them the possibility of an amalgamation. Being an unpractical idealist and underrating the doctrinaire mentality of his friends, he came back full of hope and proposed to my grandfather that a conference of all theists be called at Santiniketan. The Maharshi immediately sent for Pandit Shivadhan Vidyarnava of the Adi Samaj, who used to teach me the rudiments of Sanskrit, and ordered him that within three months I should be prepared for



the Upanayan<sup>1</sup> ceremony which was to take place at Santiniketan. This would serve as an occasion for inviting not only the Theists but all well-known Vedic pundits from every province in India. At the end of three months I was to be examined by the Maharshi himself to see whether I could recite correctly and with proper intonation his selections from the *Upanishads*, called *Brahmo-dharma*. My teacher, who had no illusions, regarding his pupil, trembled at the herculean task imposed upon him. However, the Maharshi's word was law, and teacher and pupil set to work with such grim determination that at the end of the prescribed period my grandfather was greatly pleased to hear me recite the *mantras* so dear to him. Much to my chagrin the reward, a fat cheque, went to my teacher.

The invitations for my Upanayan were now issued and I was taken to Santiniketan. The ceremonies were performed according to Vedic rites with eminent pundits as witnesses. My trial began early one morning when with shaven head, wearing a yellow robe and holding a long stick (*danda*) in one hand and a begging bowl in the other, I had first of all to recite the Upanishadic *stokas* and then take the bowl round for alms to each of the guests assembled at the Mandir. Then followed the usual confinement for three days, during which the *Gāyatri mantram* had to be learnt.

But unfortunately this was not the end, as far as I was concerned. Among the pundits there had come the renowned Vedic scholar Brahmavrata Samadhyayi from Banaras. He told my father that although my pronunciation was good, I should be taught to recite the Vedas strictly according to the Vedic rules. He was the only authority on the subject, and volunteered

<sup>1</sup> The sacred thread ceremony.

The Upanayan takes place when a Brahmin boy is considered to be of a fit age to be attached to a Guru (teacher) to begin his education. He is taught the *Gayatri mantram* which every Brahmin is expected to repeat morning and evening as the text for his contemplation of the Infinite and is given the sacred thread to wear as a symbol of his initiation as a Brahmin. In ancient times the boy had to leave his home and live with his Guru in a forest hermitage as a Brahmachari. Only after having lived a spartan life during years of rigid training was he allowed to go home and take up the duties of a householder. At present the Upanayan has lost its real significance and the Brahmacharya period is reduced to only three days of seclusion.

to stay on to teach me how to chant the Vedas. The lessons began with the meticulous rendering of the sound of *Om*. After a week of drilling I found that I had not made any appreciable progress in comprehending the mystic significance of this symbol. But the lessons continued. Thus my earliest recollection of the Asrama is associated with these feeble attempts at uniting my shrill treble with the sonorous bass of the giant pundit, chanting verses from the *Sāma-Veda*.

After about three years, most of which had been spent at Shelidah, I came back at the age of twelve to Santiniketan and this time for good. By a deed of trust the Maharshi had made over the lands and buildings at Santiniketan for the purpose of establishing an Asrama. One of his landed properties yielding an yearly income of Rs. 1,800 had been endowed for its maintenance. The Trust came into being in 1887. Amongst other things the Trust provided for the establishment of a *Brahma-Vidyalya* and a Library, and for the organisation of an annual country fair to mark the anniversary of his own initiation to *Brahmo-dharma* (7th Paush). Father had obtained permission from the Maharshi to start a school to be called Brahmacharya Asrama at Santiniketan. The formal opening ceremony was to be performed on the 7th Paush (23rd December) 1901. Father took us there a few months ahead so that he could make preparations beforehand. He had, in the meantime, sold his bungalow on the Puri sea-beach in order to form the nucleus of a fund for starting the institution. Jagadananda Roy, who had served under him at Shelidah and whose services he considered too valuable to be wasted in a zemindary office, and also a homeopath doctor, were immediately sent for to help him.

As the Guest-house could not be utilized for the school, the only other existing building, a three-roomed house in the south-west corner of the garden, was made over for the purpose. The first step taken towards equipping the school was to fit up a library in one of the rooms of this house. Father had brought his magnificent collection of books from Calcutta and this formed the nucleus of the future library at Santiniketan. The library has never been shifted since. The original building still forms the core of the present Visva-Bharati Library, but is so engulfed by later additions that it can hardly be distinguished. After the books had been safely stacked, it was found necessary

to give attention to the accommodation for students. The doctor was entrusted with the construction of a dormitory. In those days we had so few workers that the doctor had to undertake, in addition to his professional work, the duties of manager, engineer, kitchen superintendent and a host of other offices. A mudhouse was built next to the Library—a most inconveniently long and narrow shed, which remained for many years the only shelter for students as well as for teachers, and a portion of which still survives as the Adi-Kutir. The only other building to boast of was the kitchen, a few walls of which still form part of the Visva-Bharati office.

By appealing to some friends four pupils were obtained from Calcutta. I myself brought the number up to five. We were all clothed in long yellow robes as befitting Brahmacharis. On the day of the opening ceremony, however, we were given red silk *dhotis* and *chaddars* and it made us feel very proud and important to stand in a row in the Mandir, the cynosure of all eyes. My uncle Satyendranath conducted the prayers and there was quite a distinguished gathering on the occasion. The 7th Paush Mela was already an established institution of Santiniketan. Strangely enough its character has remained much the same through more than half a century. Formerly it lasted for one day only. Father had composed some new songs for the opening ceremony, one of which, *Mora satyer pare man*,<sup>1</sup> remained as the school song for many years until it was replaced by *Amader Santiniketan*<sup>2</sup>.

With the gradual increase in the number of pupils more teachers began to arrive. My old Sanskrit teacher Pandit Shivadhan Vidyarnava was brought from the Adi Brahmo Samaj. A Sindhi disciple of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Rewachand, who was afterwards known as Animananda Swami when he founded a school on the lines of Santiniketan on the outskirts of Calcutta, joined shortly afterwards as a teacher of English. He was a Roman Catholic and a strict disciplinarian; his was the kind of discipline learnt on the cricket field and applied to everyday life. This hardly appealed to Father and clashed with the ideal of freedom and self-determination which he sought

<sup>1</sup> We dedicate ourselves to truth.

<sup>2</sup> Our own Santiniketan.

to establish in the Asrama ; as a consequence, Rewachand had to leave very soon. Subodh Chandra Majumdar, a cousin of Srish Chandra Majumdar—an old friend of father's—came as our teacher of Bengali. With him also arrived Srish Babu's son Santosh as a student. We were the only two pupils in the Entrance class and we became bosom friends. The system of electing monitors and captains was introduced from the beginning of the school. But the election was observed merely as a formality during the five years Santosh and myself remained as boarders. We took turns in captaining the wild crowd of students that came, for Santiniketan, unfortunately, was regarded more or less as a reformatory in those days. This long-continued training in leadership was of great help to us both in later life.

It is difficult to remember the chronological order in which the old batch of teachers came to the Asrama. But it was during the second and third years that teachers like Hari Charan Banerji, Bhupendranath Sanyal, Satish Chandra Roy, Ajit Kumar Chakravarty, whose names are still familiar to most persons connected with the Asrama, joined the institution. Our first Headmaster, in the real sense, was Monoranjan Banerji, a cousin of Rev. Kalicharan Banerji, who took charge when we were preparing for the Entrance Examination. He did not remain very long as the place did not suit his health.

The life led by both pupils and teachers was not only simple but almost austere. The ideal of Brahmacharya was the keynote of everything. The yellow uniform, which covered up the poverty of clothes; a pair of blankets, which served as our only bedding ; the vegetarian meals comparable to jail diet in their dull monotony—these were the standards laid down. Nobody wore shoes or even sandals and such luxuries as toothpaste or hair oil were taboo. I think one of the sorest trials my mother ever had was when Father insisted that I should live in the school boarding-house. She could not bear the miserable condition in which we lived, especially with regard to food, and tried to console herself by frequently inviting the teachers and students and feeding them with tempting dishes prepared by herself. Naturally she did not resent it when surreptitious raids were made on her pantry.

In spite of everything—the poverty and lack of normal comfort and convenience—nobody complained, for we really

believed in simple living and took pride in our poverty. However simple, the strain on Father's resources to maintain the school must have been great. The institution had no income of its own besides the annual Rs. 1,800 drawn from the Santiniketan Trust. For several years students were not charged fees of any kind. They were given not only free education, but food and very often clothing as well. The whole burden had to be borne by Father, when his own private income was barely Rs. 200 a month. My mother had to sell nearly all her jewellery for the support of the school, before she died in 1902.

But it would be wrong to emphasize only the dark side of the picture. We were essentially a happy lot and life was very rich and interesting in spite of our outward poverty. Whenever Father was present, he poured his soul into the institution and made it lively by singing songs which he never tired of composing, reciting his poems, telling stories from the *Mahabharata*, playing indoor games with the boys, rehearsing plays, and even taking classes. All the teachers lived with us in the same dormitory, and we shared joys and sorrows equally amongst us. There was a wonderful feeling of genuine camaraderie. The teachers never resented the many practical jokes we played on them because they knew there was respect underneath the occasional harmless fun we indulged in. We had a wholesome fear of Jagadananda Roy, but that did not dissuade us from playing tricks on him sometimes. I remember particularly one instance. Once when he was sleeping soundly on a cot in the verandah a few of us lusty rascals quietly lifted him up with the bed and then with cries of '*Hari boi*' (pray to God) made straight for the *bund* (river) where the immersion took place. 'Master-mashay' was all the time showering curses on us, but we did not mind because we could detect a faint flicker of a smile hidden beneath his furious exterior.

We were indeed a happy family, perhaps too big to be always homogeneous, but toleration for the weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of individuals and respect for each other kept the group together in a bond of brotherly feeling, which gave a distinct character to the institution. Talented young men hardly ever came to us, but whatever their intellectual attainments, a few months at the Asrama stamped every student with a character which easily marked him off from the crowd. This kind of

character-building, to my mind, has been a real contribution of Santiniketan to our country.

### *A Summer Vacation at Santiniketan*

A fortnight of scorching sun and hot winds at the end of April 1904. The students had closed their books and gone away to seek kinder shelter elsewhere. The summer vacation at Santiniketan had begun, and left me and a few other unfortunates (including my nephew, Dinendranath, whom father once described as the 'custodian' of his songs) to a vagabond existence in the empty halls of the institution. The humming life of the Asrama had all of a sudden stopped. We prepared ourselves for a succession of dull monotonous days and the discomforts of a dry hot season. But very soon I got used to the emptiness and the loneliness. Instead of getting bored, as I had expected, I was surprised to find that new interests and strange beauties, which had quite escaped me during the busy life of the term, gradually began to permeate my consciousness and in the end completely enveloped me.

Nature is a jealous mistress : she will give herself only to those who come to her in solitude and with a clean mind. Everyday we had risen as the bells sounded and the early dawn had reddened the horizon just beyond the row of palms. But our eyes had failed to see it. Now the bell did not ring, but I hastened out of bed long before the dawn broke in the eastern sky, fearful lest I missed a shade of colour I had not seen before. The days were long, but every hour was charged with possibilities, every tree bore a message, every twitter of the birds added a new zest to life. My friends and my noisy classmates had deserted me, but the earth, the air, the sky, the little animals and insects that we scorned even to glance at on other days, had come so close to me that I could not turn away but had to look at them again and again and each time uncover some new secret, some unfamiliar aspect. It was with a keen desire for such strange discoveries and novel experiences that I would roam about the barren wastes in the blazing sun, or follow a *myna* to its nest in the *sal* forest, or keep long hours of vigil to hear the sound of the insects at night.

It was not all poetry. One day about noon I was standing

in the verandah of the library, looking at the heat-waves rising rhythmically over the barren rice-fields and the occasional whirlwinds that would come from nowhere, gather the dry leaves and shoot them straight up to impossible heights, when a pair of hyenas coolly walked into the scene and, in the twinkling of an eye, before I could take up a stick and run after them, one of them had killed a lamb, lifted it bodily up on its back and disappeared. The chase was quite useless, and in any case the lamb had been dead long before I realised what had happened. The daring swiftness of these animals is unbelievable.

It was during the summer holidays that I came in close contact for the first and last time with the poet Satish Roy. For he died before the next holidays began. But who can gauge the infinite value of the companionship of a rare genius, even though it be for a short time? He radiated energy and enthusiasm, combined a fearlessly critical mind with an almost voluptuous enjoyment of all that was good. Naive and absolutely unconventional in his thoughts and habits, he was withal deeply respectful where respect was due. The most wonderful thing about him was the rich store of his knowledge of literature; a youth of twenty-one, he could recite for hours freely from Virgil, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare or Kalidas,—his favourites being Browning and Rabindranath. His generous nature knew no distinctions, and although at that time I was quite immature in years and mind, Satish Roy poured his store of knowledge and his soul on me. During the day we would sit in a cool dark corner of the library and read the classics. And very often the whole night was spent lying on our backs on the bare ground, watching the constellations dip one after the other into oblivion, and listening to his voice reciting Bengali poetry. It was rarely necessary to ask the meaning of a word or a passage, his declamation was so expressive. But never did I hear him recite so well (and never shall I want to hear poems recited again from the mouth of any one else) as he did one day to the accompaniment of a thunderstorm that swept over the Asrama. As it was exceptionally hot and sultry that afternoon—it was the last day of Chaitra<sup>1</sup>—we had kept

<sup>1</sup> That is, the last day of the Bengali year, falling somewhere about the middle of April.

inside the darkened room longer than usual. As we stepped out, a glorious sight took us completely by surprise. Black, inky clouds had gathered in the northwest sky and kept advancing like the deep cavernous mouth of an angry monster, ready to swallow the earth. Terrible were its deep sonorous rumblings, and its path was marked with clouds of red dust mountain-high. We stood awe-struck on the verandah and watched its rapid progress across the open ground, until it flung itself upon the Asrama with deafening peals of thunder and blinding showers of rain. At the same time Satish Roy's voice rang out with the opening stanza of *Barsha-Shesh*, the well-known poem of my father on a stormy 'Year End' :

Thou comest, New Year, whirling in a frantic dance  
amidst the stampede of the wind-lashed clouds  
and infuriate showers,  
while trampled by thy turbulence  
are scattered away the faded and the frail  
in an eddy agony of death.<sup>1</sup>

His voice never faltered once, and kept even pace with the storm till the last line. I do not know whether I listened to the words that were uttered or merely watched entranced the speaker whose every movement seemed inspired. Before we realised what had happened, Satish Roy had vanished into the storm. Afterwards a search-party found his battered and half-dead form lying under a tree near the Bhuvandanga village.

With Satish Roy and Dinendranath as our leaders during the vacation, the atmosphere of the Asrama became charged with poetry and music. Everyone had either to fall into line with this mood or be lost in his own isolation. There was a puritan gentleman, a fine figure with a flowing white beard like a Hebrew patriarch, who did not approve of us youngsters leading this sort of Bohemian life in the Asrama. Like one of those Pilgrim Fathers, he considered Santiniketan to be a puritan colony, and therefore it hurt his sense of propriety to see us listening to unexpurgated editions of Shakespeare and Kalidas. I once remember him hurriedly leaving the adjoining room where he had his office, stopping both ears with his fingers, to

<sup>1</sup> Free translation of the original Bengali by the author, first published in the *Spectator*, London, 10 Jan. 1913.



avoid overhearing some particularly delectable passages from *Sakuntala*.

A teacher of science had come to spend the vacation with us, and he gave me lessons in chemistry with the help of a few test-tubes and beakers that lay in the dust in a corner of the so-called laboratory. He soon fell in with the general atmosphere and even began to personify the elements into deities—some with four arms, some with ten heads and so on, and gave graphic descriptions of their love-makings and jealousies. His descriptions were so vivid that later on when I had to take up a more serious study of the subject, I had no difficulty in working out any chemical formula. At that time we had no idea that the same science teacher would become a well-known poet of modern Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Father had accompanied my ailing sister to Almora, from where he used to send us fresh mountain-honey as a consolation. He had left the Asrama in charge of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, a remarkable figure in many ways. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, he was attracted to the Brahma Samaj in his youth. His reading of Cardinal Newman's works later on made him a convert to the Catholic faith. During this period, he edited a remarkable weekly in English, called *Sophia*. Although a Catholic, he dressed in the saffron robes of a Hindu *sannyasin*, such was his strong national feeling. It was this in-born national pride which made him finally give up Christianity and take to a militant form of Hinduism towards the end of his life. He came to the Asrama when he was still in an unsettled state of mind. But very soon the rapid development of virulent nationalism in Upadhyaya led to a parting of the ways. Father remained content with the purely educational experiment at Santiniketan, while the other started the pungent national daily, *Sandhya*, and threw himself headlong into politics in Calcutta. I have rarely met any one who could speak or write such beautiful and chaste English. But when he took to politics he gave it up for a virile colloquial Bengali of a Hitlerian type.

We regarded Brahmabandhab not only as the immediate head of the institution, but as a *sannyasin*, a spiritual man, before whom we would stand in great awe and fear. One day a wrestler

<sup>1</sup> The late Prof. Surendranath Maitra.

from the Punjab wandered into the Asrama and challenged anybody to give him a trial. A look at his figure kept everyone at a good distance. We youngsters were beginning to feel disappointed at missing such a rare treat like this when, to our consternation and surprise, Upadhyayji came running in tights and, with loud slaps on the biceps, as is the custom, challenged the Punjabi giant to a fight. And didn't the Bengali intellectual give a good time to the professional wrestler !

The aspect of Santiniketan during the dry summer months is little known to outsiders : the extreme heat and dryness which make the grass crackle underfoot, the burnt sienna colour of the whole landscape, the hot gusts of wind that raise clouds of red dust, and the sudden thunderstorms that are gorgeous to witness but destructive to all property. It is indeed a *Rudra-Vaisakh*<sup>1</sup> that visits this place, but how like magic everything is changed after the first good shower in June ! With one sweep of the magician's wand, leaves clothe the trees again, the meadows become softly green, the birds sing ceaselessly from every branch, the desert is transformed into a garden.

Nature rejoiced—but when the term began I took my seat in the class with a heavy heart.

### *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

My student life in the Santiniketan Asrama should have ended when I passed the Entrance examination. Provision for collegiate training in the institution came to be made much later. But Father did not like the idea of sending me to a college in Calcutta. So I stayed on at Santiniketan monitoring the pupils whose number had increased to more than fifty and picking up whatever knowledge I could obtain for myself from the teachers. Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya had just then come to us from Banaras. I could not have had a better teacher for Sanskrit and Pali. He would not let us treat Sanskrit as a dead language. Not content with making me memorize the Panini grammar and analyze difficult texts of Kalidas, Bhartrihari and other authors, he would insist on our carrying on conversation in that classical

<sup>1</sup> *Rudra*, terrible, the destructive aspect of Siva ;  
*Vaisakh*, corresponding to April-May.

language. I was equally fortunate in having Mohit Chandra Sen as my teacher of English. After we had gone through *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mohit Babu wanted this play to be staged at Santiniketan. Undaunted by the paucity of talents equal to producing a play in English, and one of Shakespeare's at that, we made preparations there and then. No one was spared. Our teacher of Mathematics, Jagadananda Roy, was given the part of Wall since he had only a few lines to speak. On the night of the play he duly came on the stage, started with the opening line, 'In this same interlude it doth befall that I, one Snout by name, present a Wall', then stopped, looked enquiringly at all the other actors on the stage to see if they could help him to remember the rest of his speech and at last saying, 'And thus have I Wall my part discharged so', made a hasty exit as the audience roared with laughter. However unfortunate his first appearance on the stage he was not spared by Father and later on he earned a reputation as a consummate actor when some of Father's dramas were performed in Calcutta. Particularly in the rôle of Laksheswar in *Saradotsab* as the miserly merchant, his acting rose to the height of perfection. It would almost appear as if he was cut out for the part or the part for him.

### *The Shadow of Death*

While Father was entirely absorbed in his educational experiment at Santiniketan, Mother fell ill and she had to be taken to Calcutta for treatment. Before the doctors gave up hope Mother had come to realize that she would not recover. The last time when I went to her bedside she could not speak but on seeing me, tears silently rolled down her cheeks. That night my sisters Bela, Rani and Mira and myself and my brother Sami—who was then just a small child—we were all sent to sleep in another part of the house. But Bela and I could not go to sleep. A vague fear kept us awake. Early in the morning we crept out on to a terrace overlooking the room where Mother slept. An ominous silence hung over the house, the shadow of death seemed to have crossed its threshold with stealthy steps during the night. We knew without anyone telling us that we had lost our mother. That evening my father gave me Mother's pair of slippers to keep. They have been carefully preserved ever since.

Father kept outwardly calm and went back to Santiniketan to his work there as though nothing had disturbed his mind, leaving us in the care of a distant aunt of my mother. But his feeling—the keen sense of separation and loneliness—poured into a series of poems afterwards published as *Smaran* (In Remembrance).

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of  
my room; I find her not.  
My house is small and what once has gone from it can  
never be regained.  
But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have  
come to thy door.  
I stand under the golden canopy of thy evening sky and  
lift my eager eyes to thy face.  
I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing  
can vanish—no hope, no happiness, no vision  
of a face seen through tears.  
Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the  
deepest fullness.  
Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of  
the Universe.

The death of my mother was only the beginning of a succession of deaths of many of those whom my father loved most.

Soon after he had returned to Santiniketan and had barely started to devote his attention to the school, my sister Rani developed tuberculosis and Father had to take her to Hazaribagh for open-air treatment. At that time there were no sanatoriums for treatment of this disease. Father, knowing that he would have to be absent for a long time, was anxious to find a trustworthy person under whose care he could leave the institution. He had recently come in close contact with Mohit Chandra Sen who was then engaged in getting ready a complete edition of his writings. Father had not only a deep regard for Mohit Babu's scholarship but was attracted to him by his charming personality. Mohit Babu was then a professor in a college in Calcutta. During the absence of Father he used to pay frequent visits and later on, resigning his professorship, settled down at Santiniketan and devoted himself to the school.

Finding that the climate of Hazaribagh was not bracing enough Father took my sister to the hills of Almora. I was left as a regular boarder in the Santiniketan school. After I had sat for the Entrance examination and returned to the school Mohit

Babu read Milton and Shakespeare to me and Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya taught me Sanskrit and Pali. My leisure hours were spent in translating Asvaghosha's *Buddha-Charita* into Bengali. After many years the translation was published by the Visva-Bharati in two volumes. My knowledge of Sanskrit had become so rusty by that time that I am ashamed to confess that the final editing of the book had to be entrusted to a scholar of the Research Department at Visva-Bharati Vidya-Bhavana.

With the summer vacation the students and most of the staff left Santiniketan and I was left to my own devices. On my father's desk I discovered two bound volumes containing copies of letters written by him to my cousin Indira. My cousin had evidently carefully preserved all the letters and copied them out in her beautiful handwriting in the two volumes neatly decorated by her brother Surendranath. I was greatly excited by the discovery. With a deck-chair and these two books I climbed on top of a little hillock and settled down to read the letters under the shade of a banyan tree. The panorama of the barren plain extending as far as the horizon, with nothing to break its monotony except a line of palmyra palms standing like sentinels keeping vigil over the midday solitude, spread out before me as I lay there. The heat reflected from the sandy wasteland vibrated rhythmically as it rose through the still air. Not even a bird's note distracted my attention. They had retired to leafy shades of the trees to escape from the burning heat of the sun.

The letters were written mostly from Shelidah and Potisar while Father was cruising about the rivers in that part of Bengal in his house-boat. I had been longing to spend the vacation there amidst the lusciously green fields and the placid waters of the rivers whereas I had to be content with the arid wastelands around Santiniketan where not even a blade of green could be seen. But the vivid descriptions in the letters had a magical effect on me. For days I would be transported to my favourite haunts in Shelidah and Potisar. Never have I read any book with more enjoyment. These letters were published by me and my brother-in-law Nagendranath Gangulee in 1911 as *Chhinna-Patra*. Unfortunately Father had mercilessly run his pen through good portions of the letters.

While I was loitering about the Asrama and reading the letters over and over again the sad news of the death of my sister

Rani was conveyed to me from Calcutta. Father had brought her back there finding that she had much improved in health in Almora—but a relapse ended fatally and she died nine months after the death of my mother.

Father now devoted himself with renewed zeal to the affairs of the school. The most difficult task was to find the right kind of teachers. Frequent changes had to be made. Every time a new teacher was engaged Father had to train him and mould him to fit in with the ideals of the Asrama. Under his guidance the school began to grow. It had started with five students and now there were more than fifty. Unfortunately just when he was feeling satisfied with the progress that was being made another mishap occurred in the family that greatly disturbed Father's mind. My grandfather, the Maharshi, died in Calcutta. Father had to go there as soon as he heard about his illness and remained a long time there after grandfather's death to settle business affairs consequent on the passing away of the head of a big family like ours. After the death of the Maharshi the family broke up—the members no longer lived together as in a Hindu joint family.

The death of my brother Samindra took place when I was in college in America. My younger sister Mira and Sami had remained at Santiniketan with Father when I left for the U.S.A. Sami was a bright imaginative boy and we all cherished the hope that he would be a poet like Father when he grew up. But fate decreed otherwise. While holidaying with some friends at Monghyr he fell a victim to cholera and died soon after Father arrived there. A cable brought this terrible news to me in a boarding house far from home.

A few years later, after I had settled down at Santiniketan my sister Bela, who was staying with her husband in Calcutta, fell ill. Like Rani, my elder sister also developed tuberculosis. From the time that she fell ill and until her death Father was constantly by her bedside attending her as no nurse could possibly do and trying his best to keep her cheerful. Bela could write well. Father gave her some plots and made her write short stories. Bela was his favourite child and her death was a severe blow to him.

Vicissitudes of life, pain or afflictions, however, never upset the equanimity of my father's mind. Like his father, the Maharshi,

he remained calm and his inward peace was not disturbed by any calamity however painful. Some superhuman *sakti* gave him the power to resist and rise above misfortunes of the most painful nature.

Throughout all these years of the severest trial to him Father's pen never had any rest. While he was nursing Rani and taking her from one health resort to another in the vain effort to cure her malady, he was engaged in writing the novels *Chokher Bali* (Eye-Sore) and *Nauka Dubi* (The Wreck). Father hardly ever completed writing a novel at a stretch. As each chapter would get written it would be sent to the journal publishing the novel as a serial. Even when he would be passing through very great distress editors never had to wait for the regular instalments from his pen. Only a perfect control of the emotions together with an irrepressible urge for creative expression could explain the continuous outpouring of his thoughts in poems, novels, short stories, essays and other writings irrespective of his surroundings or circumstances, mental or physical.



### *The Swadeshi Movement*

Another midsummer madness which took hold of me during the period between my Entrance Examination and departure for the U.S.A. was the fervour of an aggressive kind of patriotism. I was drawn into the whirlpool of politics that was agitating the country. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal started at the very beginning of this century and reached its acme during the years 1905 and 1906. To us, nurtured from childhood in an atmosphere of all that nationalism truly denoted, it did not come as a surprise. Those who have read my father's *Reminiscences* will remember how even in *his* boyhood days he witnessed many a valiant effort made by his elders to introduce Swadeshi in every sphere of life. A classic example was the attempt made by my uncle Jyotirindranath, whose main interest was in art and music, to float a river navigation company as a Swadeshi enterprise. He actually purchased a few steam-boats and started plying them on the East Bengal rivers. This foolhardy adventure very soon came to an abrupt end after a powerful British combine by somewhat questionable means compelled my uncle to wind up his business. He had to pay dearly for his patriotic zeal as it took him long years to repay his borrowed capital.

These efforts were only an outward symbol of their Swadeshi spirit. In their ways of living, style of dress and even in their manner of thinking, our family had remained entirely Indian in spite of the impact of English manners and customs which dominated the educated upper classes of India. In our family we were Indians to the core. Therefore when our countrymen took up the cry of Swadeshi it found a ready response in our hearts.



This movement was a people's movement—spontaneous and not whipped up by any political organisation—and it may be said to have started as a reaction to the abortive and mildly moderate politics of the National Congress. The people had become restive—they wanted to go into action to throw off the yoke of a foreign rule. The negative and quite ineffective programme of passing resolutions by the Congress did not satisfy them. A frenzy of feeling for the motherland was in evidence everywhere. Bengal was carried along a wave of emotion unsurpassed in her history. Its ripples reached us even at Santiniketan. My classmate Santosh Majumdar and myself became restive. Every morning we joined in a wandering choir led by my nephew Dinendranath and Ajit Chakravarty singing Swadeshi songs in the neighbouring villages and making collections for the National Fund. Occasionally we went into the town to preach boycott of British goods. The victory won by Japan over Russia in 1905 gave an added impetus to the Swadeshi movement. On the day the Treaty was signed we lit a big bonfire in the middle of our football field and sang songs all night long to celebrate the awakening of Asia. Father had brought a ju-jutsu expert from Japan. We took lessons from him in order to prepare ourselves to fight the British! Had not the spirit and training of judo helped the Japanese to win the war?

Quite early the movement split up into two sections—there were those who believed in peaceful methods and others, the Extremists, more often called the Terrorists, who wanted to drive out the British by bringing about a violent revolution.

For a proper understanding of the movement we must not ignore the part played by a group of intellectuals. The ground was undoubtedly prepared by them although most of them never sought the limelight. Even now very few realize the great influence they exerted on the youth of the day and how they fired their patriotic feelings. Trying to recall their names, those that come uppermost to my mind in this connection are curiously not those of Bengalis, nor even of Indians, but those of two foreigners—Count Kakuzo Okakura and Sister Nivedita.

Count Okakura came to Calcutta unobtrusively—quite a stranger to the city. How he came in contact with our family I do not know, but he made his home with my cousin Surendranath, for whom he conceived a great liking. While staying there

he soon got acquainted with the leaders of society. When he wrote his book *Ideals of the East* it came as a revelation to our people. The opening sentence, 'Asia is one. The Himalayas divide only to accentuate two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius and India with its individualism of the Vedas', stirred the inmost depths of our minds. He found congenial friends not only in members of our family but persons like Jagadish Chandra Bose, Sister Nivedita, Bipin Chandra Pal and some of the leaders of the Extremist group. Much has been written and we all know the result of the impact of the British occupation on the development of the life of Bengal, but very few realize the deep influence that the contact with the wonderful personality of this Japanese sage had on the recent history of this province. He came at a critical period, when the reaction against Westernization had barely started. Through his conversations and writings he inspired the people to regain confidence in their own civilization and to believe in the great contribution that Asia could still make to world culture. This brought about a silent revolution and orientated the minds of the intellectuals in Bengal towards a healthy nationalism which gradually penetrated the whole of India.

Sister Nivedita, the devoted follower of Swami Vivekananda, was of Irish birth. She had the zeal of a convert and was more of an Indian than any native-born. Inspired by the patriotic feelings of her *guru* the Irish blood in her did not let her remain passive. Her dynamic personality drove her to become a torch-bearer of the cause of India's freedom and her rehabilitation in spiritual and cultural status. Her association with Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission gave her ample opportunity to come in contact not only with persons of eminence but with a large number of young men. In the responsive minds of these she was able to kindle the fire of patriotism and a spirit of adventure.

In 1905 while I was spending a holiday at Giridih with Santosh Majumdar I was drawn into the thick of the movement. We had as our neighbours Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, a well-known political leader, and V. Roy, an idealist with unbounded enthusiasm for all good causes. Every morning a few of us would go about the town singing patriotic songs. In the evenings a larger party would be formed to canvass the shopkeepers to give up

selling British goods and at the end there would be a bonfire of bundles of Manchester-made cloth that we had forced the shops to part with. One day we were asked to meet the barrister, P. Mitter, who had come up from Calcutta and was putting up at the Dak Bungalow. He told us about the Anusilan Samiti and how the Terrorist party was organising an underground movement and making secret preparations for getting rid of the British and freeing our country from the foreign rule. It thrilled us to hear him talk such sedition so openly. We were drawn to him because we felt flattered that he had taken us into his confidence. Before he left we gave him our promise that we would join the Anusilan Samiti as soon as we went to Calcutta.

This was a time—such periods of exhilaration and activity come rarely in the history of a nation—when all sorts of plans were made on the spur of the moment with dozens of young men ready to carry them out. I remember how Bipin Chandra Pal, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, Ramendra Sundar Trivedi, Hem Chandra Mullick, Satish Chandra Mukherji and others would often turn up in the middle of the night and hold secret conferences with Father and Gaganendranath about some wild project. All sorts of rumours would spread like wild-fire one moment to be replaced by others of a more thrilling nature.

Although Father helped the movement forward with his lectures and writings (especially his patriotic songs), his mind was ever active in thinking how the enthusiasm of the people could be canalized in constructive work. In a paper—‘Swadeshi Samaj’—which he read to a large Calcutta audience at the Minerva Theatre about this time he outlined a comprehensive programme for the re-organisation of rural Bengal on the basis of self-help and the revival of indigenous industries.

One morning—it was a bright but chilly morning in November—we were out walking across a coppice of sal trees. The grass was still wet with dew, the drops hung glistening like crystals as the slanting rays of the sun fell on them. Father was in an exhilarated mood and kept humming a tune when suddenly he began to talk of the need for proper education in our country. Jatin Bose, the son-in-law of his friend Akshoy Chaudhury, was with us. Father went on telling him that the Calcutta University was unable to give our young men the education that they needed. On coming back to our bungalow the conversation

continued on the same subject at the breakfast table. On a sudden impulse Father asked himself : Should we not have our own national university ? Thereafter he grew restless. By the evening he had left for Calcutta with the purpose of exploring the ground for founding a national university. He met with a ready response and within a few weeks the National Council of Education came into existence. Father undertook to draft the syllabus of studies and other details for the institution to be started under the Council. In this way the beginnings of the Jadavpur University were laid. Father was, however, disillusioned after one or two meetings of the Council when he found that the members were more interested in establishing a rival to the Calcutta University, with perhaps a bias towards technical education, than in breaking away from the traditions and conventions of the code of education established by the British in India and boldly adopting a system Indian in character but suited to modern conditions. He ceased to attend any further meetings.

Father took an effective part in the agitation that followed the partition of Bengal. It almost appeared as if one day he emerged out of his seclusion to become overnight the high priest of Indian nationalism. In songs and poems and in trenchant addresses on the public platforms he bitterly attacked Curzon's policy of divide and rule. At the same time he made a powerful appeal to the people to stand together—self-respecting and self-reliant. He gave a new orientation to the traditional ceremony of *Rakhi-bandhan* and under his inspiration the wristband of coloured thread became the symbol of the undying unity of Bengal. On the day of *Rakhi-bandhan* he headed a huge procession through the streets of the city, singing the songs

*Bidhir bādhan kāthe tumi eman saktimān...*

Art thou so mighty that you wish to cut this  
fate-forged bond...

and *Bānglār māti, Bānglār jal...*

Let the earth and the water  
the air and fruits of my country be  
sweet, my God.

Let the lives and hearts of sons  
and daughters of my country  
be one, my God.

Unprecedented scenes of patriotic emotion were witnessed on this day. In the afternoon a big crowd had gathered in the spacious courtyard of Pashupati Bose's house at Baghbazar. Father appealed to the people to raise a fund to be called the National Fund for building a People's Hall and carrying on the national movement. More than Rs. 50,000 was collected on the spot.

It became apparent to Father, however, that he could not approve of the turn the political leaders were trying to give to the Swadeshi movement. In all his associations with political movements from the Swadeshi movement of 1905-6 to the Non-Cooperation movement of 1921 he constantly raised his solitary voice reiterating his belief in a constructive programme. People often wonder why he should have identified himself and even taken a leading part in the Swadeshi movement and then suddenly dissociated himself from its activities.

I think that was mainly because the genius in him was fundamentally creative in its character. It was impossible for him to accept what he called 'the passion for rejection' as an ideal. In one of his letters to C. F. Andrews in March, 1921 he has recounted a very significant incident :

I remember the day, during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, when a crowd of young students came to see me in the first floor of our 'Vichitra' house. They said to me that if I would order them to leave their schools and colleges they would instantly obey. I was emphatic in my refusal to do so, and they went away angry, doubting the sincerity of my love for my motherland. And yet long before this popular ebullition of excitement, I myself had given a thousand rupees, when I had not five rupees to call my own, to open a Swadeshi store and courted banter and bankruptcy.

The reason for my refusal to advise those students to leave their school was because the anarchy of emptiness never tempts me, even when it is resorted to as a temporary measure. I am frightened at an abstraction which is ready to ignore living reality. These students were no mere phantoms to me.

For a similar reason he regarded the idea of non-cooperation also as 'political asceticism' and failed to reconcile himself to the negative expressions of the contemporary movement in India. 'Our students', Father wrote in the same letter from which I have quoted above, 'are bringing their offering of sacrifices to

what? Not to a fuller education, but to non-education.'

Earlier, in 1920, he had written in words more positive and emphatic :

I find our countrymen are furiously excited about Non-cooperation. It will grow into something like our Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Such an emotional outbreak should have been taken advantage of in starting independent organizations all over India for serving our country.

Let Mahatma Gandhi be the true leader in this ; let him send his call for positive service, ask for homage in sacrifice, which has its end in love and creation. I shall be willing to sit at his feet and do his bidding if he commands me to cooperate with my countrymen in service and love. I refuse to waste my manhood in lighting fires of anger and spreading it from house to house.

But perhaps he explained his position best in the following words written to C. F. Andrews from New York in January, 1921 :

Swadeshi, swarajism, ordinarily produce intense excitement in the minds of my countrymen, because they carry in them some fervour of passion generated by the exclusiveness of their rage. It cannot be said that I am untouched by this heat and movement. But somehow, by my temperament as a poet, I am incapable of accepting these objects as final. They claim from us a great deal more than is their due. After a certain point is reached, I find myself obliged to separate myself from my own people, with whom I have been working, and my soul cries out : The complete man must never be sacrificed to the patriotic man, or even to the merely moral man.

To me humanity is rich and large and many-sided.

Father's faith in the creative nationalism of India steadily grew and developed into the larger ideal of a cultural co-operation among the peoples of the East and the West, which he chose to call the ideal of *Visva-Bharati*. On his return from Europe in 1921 he finally dedicated himself to the multifarious creative and constructive activities of the institutions that he had organized at Santiniketan and Sriniketan, which, being international in their character and outlook, were, as Mahatma Gandhi had once aptly put it, 'truly national'.

So, there came the inevitable parting of the ways. Father's withdrawal from the political arena was as complete as un-

obtrusive. Only some poems of his *Kheya* gave expression to his feelings. There was, however, no lack of activity in his retirement. His programme of constructive nationalism led him a few years later to Sriniketan. In the meantime he fell back on his own resources. He had his own estates as an experimental ground. There he sent a group of workers whom he had trained to organize the villages on a plan outlined by him. He thought that in order to resuscitate rural life, agriculture, which is the basic economic resource of the people, must be improved. He, therefore, desired that Santosh and I must go abroad to get technical training in agriculture and animal husbandry so that after our return we could help him.



### *Outward Bound*

Just then an opportunity came. An association had been formed to help students to go to foreign countries to study science and industry. Father heard that the first batch of students would be sailing for Japan and the U.S.A. very soon. He asked us to get ready to join this party. We were to go on to the U.S.A. and study in a University which provided training in agriculture.

Thus in the month of April, 1906, a group of sixteen young men from Bengal ventured forth in quest of education in a cargo boat bound for the Far East. Their only resources were a concession passage provided by a benevolent society and a bunch of introduction letters. But the lack of material resources did not in any way cool the wild ardour and reckless spirit of this group, fresh from the political battleground of the Swadeshi movement. Most of them wanted to acquire the technical knowledge and skill needed for modern industry and aspired to revive trade and commerce in India.<sup>1</sup> They had neither money nor preliminary training and their ignorance of the foreign countries whither they were bound was colossal. As a young boy of eighteen I did not find the company uncongenial though strange and so utterly different from what we had been used to at Santiniketan.

Drifting from port to port along the coast of Malay and China we managed to reach Japan after about five weeks. Our admiration for Japan in those days was boundless. We looked upon every Japanese as a hero. Had they not helped to kill the spectre of the 'foreign devil' in the Orient for good? Therefore we were overjoyed to arrive in Japan at the moment when they were celebrating their victory. I had a vivid recollection of how

<sup>1</sup> A good many of them became the heads of big industrial concerns later on.



we had celebrated the victory of Japan over the Russians a few weeks ago in Santiniketan. We were conscious of the epoch-making character of this victory for Asia and readily joined in the round of festivities held in Tokyo. All the parks and public squares were tastefully decorated with piles of guns and ammunition captured from the enemy. Every day we would walk round and round these places with awe and veneration. Our regard for the Japanese rose to a still higher degree when we found that on tram-cars and other public conveyances the people, in particular women and old men, would leave their seats to make room for us, all the time making deep obeisances, because we hailed from the country of Buddha's birth. We might have expected arrogance after such a military victory but not this touching reverence for a spiritual ideal and it confirmed our faith in the unity of Asia, so nobly preached by the Japanese writer, Kakuzo Okakura.

Most of my companions thought they had come far enough from home, and their adventures ended on reaching Japan. But after many an amusing attempt to get passed by the American authorities, the two of us who had come from Santiniketan managed to get steerage passages on an American Pacific liner. The American laws allowed only a small percentage of immigrants from Asia to land on the western coast. The poor doctor in charge of emigration had therefore to find some excuse for rejecting the others. After having been thus refused on the plea of an eye disease, I went to consult a Japanese specialist. On learning the reason for my visit he laughed aloud, and said he would give me a prescription not for treatment but for fooling the American doctor. It was nothing but a problem of mathematics. He asked me to appear before the doctor every day—the man could not possibly remember all the faces as he had to examine thousands every day—and it was only a question of luck how soon I would get included in the ten per cent quota. I was indeed lucky to get approved on the third day.

A third class passage in the steerage was an experience worth having in those days. We were herded together, twenty-eight in a cabin, lined with five tiers of bunks. This cabin also served as the dining-room. The congestion, the filth and the wretched food that was supplied, defy description. But the worst torture that we suffered during our seventeen days' passage across the

Pacific was the type of American men and women (there was no segregation of the sexes) whom we had to associate with. We had a few Japanese fellow-passengers also. One day a Japanese had inadvertently occupied the usual seat of an American at the dining-table. The giant of a fellow not only abused the diminutive Japanese in the filthiest language but pulled out a knife and showed fight. Our *amour propre* was terribly hurt when instead of standing up to it the Japanese left the room. In a few moments, however, he was back with a contingent of his fellow-countrymen and announced that now that they were equal in number to the Yankees, they were prepared to fight. The honour of Asia was thus saved.

### *My First Glimpse of the U.S.A.*

On the second day we went up to the tiny deck allotted to us to get a breath of fresh air. But the supercilious way in which the first class passengers looked down upon this sorry lot of humanity huddled together was more than we could bear and we hastened back to our hovel to nurse our wounded pride. During the remaining days never once did we attempt to go up again. It was a godsend that I had the collected edition of my father's works, edited by Prof. Mohit Chandra Sen and published shortly before we sailed. By the time the voyage ended we had got almost every line by heart. We hardly knew when we had stopped at Honolulu, as, on account of an epidemic in the islands, the passengers were not allowed to go ashore. A great many days after, we guessed from the conduct of our fellow-passengers that the end of the voyage was in sight. Trusting that at last the agony was over, one evening we packed our things and lay down but hardly had any sleep for the excitement of arriving at San Francisco the next morning. While it was still dark we crept up on deck and kept our eyes glued to the horizon towards which the boat was moving. A beautiful dawn broke with a fantail of such brilliant colours as only the Pacific can boast of. We soon noticed that every officer had his binocular steadily pointed shoreward. An ominous silence hovered over the ship. Whisperings and nodding of heads; then more binoculars brought out. Another long spell of silence. Those of us on deck became nervous and suspicious. With a

lurch the boat turned round. It was then that we saw what had seemed a mystery a few moments ago : the charred remains of a few skyscrapers and the thick black clouds of smoke slowly spreading out along the horizon in long serpentine coils and smirching the brilliant sky with their foulness. The boat stopped before the Golden Gate—no longer the golden gate leading to the Queen of Cities, but the gate leading to hell if any hell on earth can be imagined. Where the city had stood there were now heaped ruins, charred corpses and bewildered and famished animals roving about on roads twisted out of shape. Thus we learnt of the great earthquake and the fire that had devastated the city, and a shiver of horror ran through the boat. In those days the wireless had not been invented and we had no previous warning of the disaster. This was the welcome we received from America, two kids hugging to our breasts a solitary letter of introduction to somebody at Berkeley, which had been razed to the dust during the previous night.

The trains were busy transporting the fleeing population of the ruined city to safer places inland. The captain allowed us to stay on the boat for three days after which, standing long hours in a queue, we managed to get two berths on a train bound for Chicago. Somebody had told us that there was a good agricultural college at the University of Illinois. Chicago being in the state of Illinois, we thought the university could not be too far from it. When the train started I found the upper berth was occupied by an injured lady. During the night she died and was taken away. In the morning while going across the mountains we struck a blizzard and the train was snow-bound. The passengers got out and amused themselves playing snowballs until after some hours the driver whistled to us to come back. An ice-breaker engine had come to the rescue and cleared the tracks.

At Chicago we enquired about the location of the State University and handed over to the telegraph girl a message addressed to the Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. requesting him kindly to meet two students from India arriving that day. We congratulated ourselves on our brain-wave. At least there would be somebody to receive us. There ought to be a Y.M.C.A. in the place and it must have a Secretary. But alas, we found no one who could possibly have any remote connection with the organization at the station at Champaign. After a few days

when we did meet the Secretary we discovered that the telegram was delivered to him but the message was changed to read 'Two students from Indiana'. The girl at the telegraph office had made the correction herself doubting the existence of any place called India. Indiana being a neighbouring State the Secretary had not bothered about giving a reception to the two students at the station.

### *Cosmopolitan Club*

The United States in 1906 cared little for the outside world. We found in our University just a handful of foreign students and these were mostly from the Philippines and Mexico. All of them felt ill at ease—their American fellow students being either too inquisitive or too indifferent.

I tried to get the few foreigners together and started a cosmopolitan club. Fortunately we were able to secure the sympathy of some of our professors without whose help it would have been impossible for us to obtain a footing or any kind of status in the University. The one on whom we came to rely most was Dr. A. R. Seymour, Professor of the Romance languages. He not only helped the Cosmopolitan Club to get firmly established at the University—but all the foreign students whatever their nationality found a genuine friend in him. To me his house in Nevada Street became a real home. Mrs. Seymour's motherly affection, when I was in most need of it, has remained a bright spot in an otherwise dull existence during the three years of my stay at this mid-west University. I used to go and chat with her whilst she washed dishes, very often lending a hand heedless of her warnings that glass and chinaware were prone to be somewhat fragile. During leisure hours she would listen to my readings from translations of the Indian classics. In return she would sometimes favour me with readings of poems she had herself composed. Years later when Father came to spend a few months at Urbana while I was working for my doctorate—every evening he would go to the Seymours' house and read to them the essays contained in *Sadhana* which he was then writing. There was always a warm corner ready for him in their sitting room. My friendship with the Seymours did not cease with my leaving the University. I still correspond with

Mrs. Seymour whose affection and friendship for me through half a century remain a most prized possession.

While on the topic of the Cosmopolitan Club, let me share with my readers a recent letter (July 8, 1956) I have received from Mrs. Seymour.

Do you remember a youthful student from India at Illinois saying "Auf Wiedersehen" in 1909 at the last banquet of the year of the Cosmopolitan Club? In Mr. Seymour's files I have discovered letters, papers, programs which would furnish material for an Early History of the Cosmopolitan Club at the University of Illinois. Among them is this program of the Banquet. I am reminded of your enthusiasm for the Club, your devotion and solicitude for its welfare and progress. You knew of the struggle to get it started right—with a Club House, a dedicated membership. You may not have realized, however, what a struggle the members had after you left.

To resume our story: within a year the membership of the Cosmopolitan Club increased considerably and I was elected President.

The movement in the meantime had spread to a number of other universities in the United States and I had to consider bringing them under a federation, which was afterwards named the Association of International Clubs. Before I left we were negotiating with a similar movement in Europe called the Corda Fraters. These Cosmopolitan or International Clubs have come to be a feature in the American Universities. My friend Leonard Elmhirst, when he was a student at Cornell, was able to get a handsome donation from Mrs. Dorothy Straight to build a Club House at the University in memory of her first husband. It is a magnificent building functioning as the centre for many social and educational activities of the University.

The general outlook of the students—I can speak only for the period I was there—was extremely narrow and parochial in this Middle West University. There was nothing of the freedom of mind and spirit of adventure which is generally associated with Universities. It seemed strange to us that the University should be considered a congenial ground for the propaganda of missionaries and even evangelists. Once I was horrified to witness the exploits of the evangelist Billy Sunday, notorious for his flamboyant methods and platform antics, at a meeting largely

attended by students. Next day, after I had written a mild protest which the editor surprisingly printed in the daily newspaper of the University, the *Illini*, I was assailed from all quarters. When it was getting too hot for me and I was thinking of leaving the University, the paper published an editorial strongly supporting my views. This biting criticism of the attitude of the student community was written by a senior student—an assistant editor of the *Illini* by the name of Carl Van Doren. I was immensely pleased to get this unexpected support from a fellow student quite unknown to me. Long afterwards I was delighted to find that Carl Van Doren had become one of the foremost literary critics in America.

### *Homeward Bound*

By the summer of 1909 I had finished my studies at the University of Illinois and on my way home spent a few months in Europe. In London I had the unique opportunity of staying with Surendranath Banerjea in a flat in Clement's Inn. As far as I remember he had come there in connection with a Press Conference as a representative of his newspaper the *Bengalee*. But his time was mostly taken up in meeting political leaders and addressing meetings to interest the British people in India. People of all shades of politics, especially those belonging to the Liberal Party, constantly visited him. Sir Henry Cotton's son, H. E. A. Cotton, attached himself to Surendranath and acted as his secretary. The visitor that impressed me most was the renowned editor of the *Review of Reviews*, W. T. Stead. He belonged to that band of liberal-minded humanitarians that strangely enough England produced at the time when she was the worst oppressor of the weak and down-trodden nations of the world. I admired him just as much as H. W. Nevinson whom I met many years later.

Surendranath received ovations wherever he spoke. I especially remember the dinner party given at the Westminster Hotel by the National Liberal Club. Surendranath was at his best when he replied to the address of welcome that evening. Some English people sitting close to me whispered that such eloquence expressed in such faultless English had never been heard in England since the time of Burke. He was a born orator. But he took

great pains in preparing his speeches. I often heard him rehearsing in his room in a loud voice speeches that had to be delivered the next day. Surendranath was methodical. He started the morning with vigorous dumb-bell exercises and then had an enormous breakfast. Very often my friend Kedarnath Das Gupta, who volunteered to look after him in London, and I would have to go out to an A.B.C. Restaurant to appease our hunger as there would be nothing left on the table of the three breakfasts ordered !

Many years later in 1917 I came in contact with Surendranath in Calcutta under rather unhappy circumstances. The Congress was to be held in Calcutta and people wanted to show their gratitude to Mrs. Annie Besant for the suffering she had undertaken for the cause of the Indian National Movement. When her name was proposed for the post of President, Surendranath violently opposed it as his conservative feelings could not tolerate the idea of a woman with extremist views presiding over the affairs of the Congress.

Father warmly supported her candidature and was persuaded to accept the Chairmanship of the Reception Committee in opposition to the nominee of the old guards. When the controversy was resolved with the acceptance of Mrs. Besant as the President Father stepped down. He attended the Congress session on the first day. There is a painting by Gaganendranath of Father reciting the poem *India's Prayer* at this meeting. He was given a tremendous ovation.

Except at the world-famous experiment station at Rothampstead, I could not find much opportunity in England at that time to improve my knowledge of agricultural science. I went over to Germany and attended lectures at the University of Goettingen for a term. Apart from its reputation as a University, Goettingen is interesting from its association with Prince Bismarck. He entered the University as a student but the authorities soon discovered that it was impossible for them to enforce discipline on this unruly young man. When severe punishments failed to curb his mischievous activities he was told that he would not be allowed to live within the jurisdiction of the University. The young Bismarck immediately built for himself a little cottage just across the bridge over the stream that demarcated the boundary of the University, an ingenious way indeed of flouting authority. The same authorities later on not only

carefully preserved this cottage but built a tower on the top of a hill as a memorial to Bismarck, their most distinguished student.

It was at Goettingen that I had the opportunity of seeing a duel. I had no idea that duels were still being fought at the beginning of the twentieth century. I was told that it was quite common among the students of Germany. Since it was prohibited by law the duels at Goettingen took place in an out-of-the-way restaurant some distance from the town. The police conveniently kept their eyes closed. A large hall in a barn-like structure adjoining the restaurant was set aside for this entertainment. It must have been considered an entertainment indeed, since there were galleries along the walls for seating the spectators of whom quite a few hundred turned up every week-end when duels would be held. A thick layer of sawdust was spread over the ground in the arena where stood a group of several pairs of duellists, their seconds and a couple of doctors. This room was reeking with the smell of iodoform and, as I entered, a duel had just begun. The duellists had chosen broad swords and were slashing at each other. Presently a portion of the scalp the size of a rupee flew off the head of one of the combatants. The doctors stopped the fight and soaked the head with disinfectant but no sutures were made. Scars on the face and head were much prized by the student community. Girls were attracted by them—the uglier the better. The friend who had taken me wanted to stay on to witness a few more duels. But the sight of one was sickening enough for me and I beat a hasty retreat.

### *Shelidah Again*

Towards the end of 1909 I returned home. The house at Shelidah was being got ready for me—I was to look after the estates. I could at the same time have a farm of my own and carry on agricultural experiments as I pleased. The prospect could not be better for a young man with plenty of energy. Hardly had I got home than Father took me out on a tour round the estates to make me acquainted with the people and teach me the details of management. It was a novel experience for me to travel with Father—just the two of us—in a house-boat. Successive bereavements and particularly the loss of Sami had



left him very lonely and he naturally tried to pour all his affection on me as soon as I returned home. As we drifted along through the network of rivers so familiar to both of us, every evening we sat out on the deck and talked on all sorts of subjects. I had never talked so freely with Father before this, and I had to make considerable effort to break the ice. I think Father must have been hugely amused to hear me prattle and glibly repeat copybook maxims on agronomy, genetics, evolution and such subjects as were still fresh in my mind. Most of the time he would listen patiently but when he did talk he told me about the social and economic conditions of our rural folk, the problems of their life and his own experience in dealing with them. Rarely would he talk on literature, probably thinking that my training in the sciences barred me from appreciating the arts. Father and son never came to a more intimate understanding of each other than in this winter of 1910.

I settled down at Shelidah and led the life of a country gentleman. A farm was laid out, seeds of maize, clover and alfalfa were imported from America; discs, harrows and such modern implements suitable to Indian conditions were introduced. Even a small laboratory was fitted up for soil testing. The highest compliment was given me by Myron Phelps<sup>1</sup> when he told me that at Shelidah he had discovered a genuinely successful American farm.

As I was engaged in this pleasant occupation Father sent for me and proposed that I should marry Pratima, the niece of my cousin Gaganendranath. The wedding was celebrated in February, 1910 in Calcutta. This was the first time a widow marriage had taken place in our family.

A few years of uninterrupted happiness followed. I was kept busy looking after the business of the estates and the agricultural experiments in the farm while my wife continued with her studies with the help of Miss. Bourdette, a teacher who had come from the University of Illinois. This sort of country life among the peasantry of Bengal which was so pleasant to me suddenly came to an end when Father sent for me and proposed

<sup>1</sup> Myron Phelps, a lawyer from New York, came to visit India about this time and became popular amongst Indians due to his sympathetic attitude towards their struggle for freedom.

that I should go to Santiniketan and give whatever help I could to the school. Father felt that the burden of the Santiniketan institution was getting too heavy for him. My classmate Santosh Majumdar was already there and my brother-in-law Nagen Gangulee was expected back from the U.S.A. any day. All the three whom my Father had helped to get trained at the University of Illinois were to strengthen the meagre staff of teachers of his school at Santiniketan. The delightful house at Shelidah called the 'Kuthibari', surrounded by a rose garden and beyond that the acres of farmland lusciously green during the wet months and bright yellow with fragrant mustard flowers in the winter; the capricious river Padma ever changing its course; the house-boat full of pleasant associations of the past; the one-armed shikari Chamru—my faithful companion in shooting expeditions;—all those things that I loved most were to be left behind for the barren wastelands of Santiniketan.



### *Vichitra and the Art Movement in Bengal*

A raw youth fresh from a technical college in the corn-belt of the United States, with no pretensions whatever to aesthetic sensibility returned home to an atmosphere of literary and artistic endeavour and felt bewildered. He found there no trace of Bohemian living which might have struck a sympathetic chord in one hardly weaned from adolescence. Neither was there the garrulity of artistic parlance and the irresponsible chatter commonly associated with the art-worlds of Western capitals with which he had become familiar en route home through Europe. A strange experience it was for him to come into intimate contact for the first time with persons who, while living the normal life of the Indian gentry, were making experiments and creating forms that were destined to work as a tremendous vital force in the renaissance of Indian Art.

It was this supreme indifference to the value of their creative genius which more than anything else surprised me, nurtured as I had been on the pragmatic philosophy of America. Surprise gradually grew into wholesome awe as my feet inevitably led me every morning to the verandah where cousin Abanindra and his brothers sat working.

To one who had been used for many years to Western ideas and customs it was a revelation to be drafted into the coterie of the artist brothers and watch their manner of work and even more their manner of thinking. Where was their studio? Where were the easels? There sat the three brothers, Gaganendra, Samarendra and Abanindra, on three easy chairs in a long verandah facing the south, and there they painted, carried on estate work, entertained visitors and held their court in a truly

oriental atmosphere of simplicity and repose. It was here that the students came (Abanindranath had already retired from the Art School, but in the East students prefer a master to a school) and sat discussing problems that were puzzling their minds or stood behind, silently watching him work. Here also came friends of oriental art and art-critics to have a look at the latest drawings and paintings. Dealers would bring old miniatures, illuminated manuscripts and other priceless *objets d'art*, not so often for sale, as for expert opinion and valuation. Besides these, there were, of course, a medley of visitors from high officials to petty job seekers and always a group of hangers-on, who regaled the company with a constant supply of the latest gossip of the city.

None of these social distractions disturbed their equanimity or interfered with their work. The brothers, with the exception of Samarendra—no less an artist but too modest to vie with his more gifted brothers—sat there each with a long-piped hookah, a bowl of water on which floated a rose, and a few simple painting materials beside them. It was in these surroundings that I watched in amazement the making of paintings that have since become famous.

Abanindra had become well-known as an artist before the eldest brother took up the brush. As head of the family Gaganendra's youth was more occupied with entertaining and fulfilling the multifarious social duties appertaining to such a position in a joint-family of the upper classes in India. His spare time was taken up with photography when it was not requisitioned for dramatic performances. A born actor, he had his part reserved in any new play that was produced in our family. What made him discover his talent as a painter I am not sure—perhaps Kakuzo Okakura and some Japanese artist friends might have inspired him—but about 1910 when I returned home, painting was still only an occasional hobby with him. He had not found his *métier* yet. My father's *Reminiscences* was being published then in the original Bengali, and I was able to persuade Gaganendranath to draw a few illustrations for the book. These are, I believe, the earliest of his drawings to be reproduced.

It was about this time that the Indian Society of Oriental Art was started, as a result of the social contacts of Gaganendra

and Abanindra with Justice Woodroffe, N. Blount, O. C. Gangoly and other art-lovers. The annual exhibitions consisted entirely of the prolific productions of the two brothers, and a few selected paintings of their favourite pupils, Nandalal Bose, Suren Ganguly, Asit Halder, Sailen Dey, Kshitin Majumdar and others. These exhibitions were a great feature of the winter season in Calcutta and served a most useful purpose as a cultural and social occasion, not only for that city but for the whole country, since people from all over India used to flock to the then capital during the 'season'. Gaganendranath was the moving spirit behind this organisation and it was the charm of his personality that drew the *élite* as well as the crowd to the show. In this connection, I should not fail to mention Lord Carmichael and, later on, Lord Ronaldshay (afterwards the Marquess of Zetland), but for whose enlightened patronage of Indian Art, the Oriental Art Society could hardly have achieved the position it did. They not only lent their names to the Society but also persuaded the Government to loosen the purse-strings on its behalf.

The artist in Gaganendra and Abanindra was not confined merely to their brush. Their genius covered a wide field. The family house in which they lived had been furnished and decorated by the preceding generation in the conventional Victorian style. The artists remodelled the house and started to refurnish it. The services of a South Indian carpenter, a master of his craft, were employed to execute the designs made by the artist brothers. The style of indoor decoration invented by them became quite the fashion later on in Calcutta. But the acme of their joint efforts was reached in the drawing-room—a magnificent example of semi-oriental treatment—decorated with the choicest collection of paintings and Indian art-ware, a room that has been the envy of connoisseurs from the world over.

The memory of many an unforgettable evening in this room comes back to my mind. There would be a few lovers of art and music reclining in meditative poses on spacious divans, with lights dimmed, listening to the melodious strains of the *Veena*. On such memorable evenings I would sit in an obscure corner and silently watch the company which very often included such distinguished foreigners as the great traveller and philosopher Count Keyserling, that artist and friend of all artists William Rothenstein, the inimitable Pavlova, the great visionary Kakuzo

Okakura, the art-critic Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Russian aristocrat and art collector Golubew, the delightful Karpéles sisters and that lover of art, Lord Carmichael.

The mention of Lord Carmichael reminds me of the close friendship that grew up between this high official and my cousin Gaganendra. Lord Carmichael, who was for years the Governor of Bengal, left an unfortunate impression in the minds of the people towards the end of his rule by a series of political blunders. But those who, like my artist cousins, came to know him intimately could not help respecting him for his genuine understanding of art and his enthusiasm for the revival of the artistic crafts of Bengal. Bengal cannot but remain grateful to him for helping the revival of the Murshidabad silk industry. The Bengal Home Industries Association was established at his suggestion and with the help of Government funds, which he placed generously at its disposal. No better person could have been chosen as Secretary to this Association than Gaganendra. The success of the sales depot at Hogg Street for a few years was entirely due to his indefatigable efforts to create an interest in the beautiful handicrafts of Bengal, which were dying out for want of patronage.

During this period Gaganendra used to go up to Darjeeling quite frequently. To these summer visits we owe the magnificent series of Himalayan sketches. The snowy range had a most wonderful fascination for him, and his imagination had worked out an upturned face in the skylines of Kanchenjunga, which characterise most of the paintings that he did of these majestic peaks. While in the hills he used to fancy his own adaptation of the Tibetan robe. Thereafter this gown-like thing became the distinctive dress of the artist brothers, as well as of my father's. Experiments with dress run in the family.

After some time, when I had sufficiently imbibed the artistic atmosphere in which I found myself, my practical bent of mind would not remain content until I had canalised all the artistic talent going to waste (so it seemed to me at the time, thanks to my American training!) into some sort of an organisation. Thus came into being the Vichitra Club, which many Calcutta people will still remember. My cousins ungrudgingly gave their help. The first meeting was held in the 'Lalbari' with a very distinguished membership, Brajendra Nath Seal presiding. Cousin

Surendranath had prepared the rules of the Club—if a constitution which provided for no membership, no fees, no obligations of any kind, could be said to have any rules. Nandalal Bose had drawn for the club the design of a seal, in which the name *Vichitra* was calligraphed in the shape of a rural cottage. At the end of the meeting my father gave readings from some of his unpublished works. The gathering dispersed from the hall upstairs only to meet again in the dining-room below, where a sumptuous banquet had been spread. The room was decorated in red and gold and had the appearance of the interior of a Chinese pagoda. As long as the Club continued to function, these banquets, on each occasion with a different and novel scheme of decoration, remained a conspicuous and attractive feature.

During the nineties Count Okakura had brought with him on one of his many visits two young artists from Japan. They stayed behind as the guests of Gaganendra. While they painted, sitting on the ground, with the silk on which they painted spread before them, the whole family watched with amazement their masterly strokes of free-hand drawing and the dexterous use of the brush. One of these is now the famous leader of the Bijutsen School of Painters, Taikan. Gaganendra was influenced by the Japanese technique as his early works show. It was this love for Japanese art that many years afterwards induced the Club to bring out again another Japanese artist, Kampo Arai, in order to open painting classes under its auspices.

The Vichitra Club had all sorts of activities. During the day it functioned as an art school with studios where the painters, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and Surendranath Kar worked at their paintings, N. K. Deval modelled figures, Mukul Dey made etchings, while a few students (my wife Pratima was one of the earliest) hovered around them. In the evenings the library was the main attraction. Once a week the studio would resolve itself into a social club of artists, writers and musicians. And quite frequently there would be dramatic performances or musical soirées.

Very soon other activities were added. Collections were made of the indigenous artistic crafts of the province. A young man was sent out on a roving mission to collect *alpana* designs, specimens of embroidery, pottery and basketry work from

villages. The *alpana* designs, together with the nursery and *Brata* rhymes that Abanindra knew so well, were afterwards published in book form.

During this period Gaganendra discovered a new medium—that of caricature—for giving expression to his fund of humour and satire. The few that found their way into newspapers and magazines established his popularity at once. The demand for reproductions helped to create another department of the Vichitra Club. A second-hand litho press was purchased and the services of an old Muhammedan printer were enlisted. In the morning Gaganendra would paint a caricature, the same afternoon would find him transferring it to stone slabs and then supervising the printing of the copies. In this way two volumes of reproductions were published which found a ready sale.

The Vichitra Club closed its doors when the Visva-Bharati began to claim more and more of our attention, and some of the artists, like Asit Kumar Haldar and afterwards Nandalal Bose and Surendranath Kar were called away to Santiniketan to organise an Art School there (now known as the Kala-Bhavana). During the few years that the Vichitra Club flourished, it served as an important social, intellectual and artistic centre for Calcutta, and contributed greatly to the cultural life of Bengal. It owed all its achievements to the three great personalities—my father, Gaganendra and Abanindra. It set a unique example of how the combined efforts of a few men of genius can set tremendous creative forces at work. I have dwelt mainly on its achievements in the art world but its contribution to literature was no less. In its weekly gatherings could be counted almost all the literary men worth mentioning at that time in Bengal. All important writings from the pen of my father, Sarat Chandra Chatterji, Pramathanath Chaudhuri and others were read out here. The *Sabuj Patra* movement, with its advocacy for adopting a purer form of the spoken Bengali as the medium of the language of literature, and freeing it from undue Sanskrit influence, may be said to have had its birth in the Vichitra Club.



*Dramas and Play-acting*

Play-acting had an important place in the social and intellectual life in our family residence at Jorasanko. My father was born in this tradition and started quite early to write dramas and have them performed by members of the family, usually taking the leading part himself.

His earliest play produced in this way is *Bālmiki Pratibhā* (The Genius of Valmiki) in 1881 when he was barely twenty. In the writing and staging of this play his elder brother Jyotirindranath not only greatly encouraged him but collaborated with him in setting tunes to the songs. The play is an opera, the first of its kind attempted in this country. In order to render the music capable of interpreting the characterization and the movements dramatically, the composers did not mind adapting Western modes and tunes where necessary. From the point of view of music it was a bold and novel experiment. Although the opera was composed when the author was yet in his teens it has since then been staged quite often and is still held in esteem. Misfortune seems to have attended its first performance in the month of February 1881 when the stage had been set up on the roof of the Jorasanko house. A storm made a clean sweep of the whole bamboo structure. The performance, nevertheless, took place and Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the celebrated Bengali novelist, who happened to be present, referred to it in high terms in the pages of the *Bangadarsan*. Later on it was performed in the courtyard of our house in the presence of Lady Lansdowne. The cast, drawn from our own family, were nearly all accomplished musicians and some of them no mean actors. The performance proved a success, the novelty of its form and music giving a pleasant surprise to the *élite* of the then capital who had been invited to witness it. The only evidence of this performance we now have are two photographs of one of the scenes which have become fairly familiar to the public, having been reproduced in Father's collected works.

*Māyār Khelā* (Sport of Illusion) is the only other opera that Father has composed. This was published in book form in 1888. It is perhaps more original than *Bālmiki Pratibhā* whose theme is taken from the *Ramayana* and the music of which shows

foreign influence. *Māyār Khelā* was written at the request of Mrs. P. K. Ray for the benefit of a charitable ladies association known as the Sakhi Samiti, who performed it themselves for the first time in Bethune College; it has since been produced fairly often.

Then followed *Rājā-o-Rāni* (*The King and the Queen*) and *Bisarjan* (*Sacrifice*), dramas in the real sense. The first of these was staged at Birjitalao at the residence of my uncle Satyendra-nath. My mother was persuaded to take the part of Narayani, in *Rājā-o-Rāni*, the first and only time she appeared on the stage.

Possibly the premier performance of *Bisarjan* took place at 49 Park Street, where my uncle Satyendranath had moved from his previous residence at Birjitalao. It is interesting to note that His Highness Bir Chandra Manikya, the then Maharaja of Trippera, who took a keen interest in the play, the theme of which has reference to an episode in the ancient history of his own dynasty, was present at this performance. The well-known photograph of Father as Raghupati bemoaning the death of Jayasingha seems to have been taken on this occasion. All the above events occurred before I was born. I have only a very vague recollection of the later performance of *Bisarjan* when it was produced by the Sangit Samaj in its club house at Cornwallis Street.

*Rājā-o-Rāni* has the distinction of being a much-performed and much-transformed play, both in public and private, inasmuch as it has been produced under the three distinct names and forms of *Rājā-o-Rāni*, *Bhairaber Boli* and *Tapati*. Akshoy Mazumdar, of comic fame, the stalwart of many a comedy and the first and foremost robber in *Bālmiki-Pratibhā* just missed turning pathos into bathos in a specially moving scene of *Rājā-o-Rāni* by his usual comical grimaces, and yet his one grievance was that he had never been given the tragic part he could have done justice to!

Speaking of acting and singing, it is difficult not to recall the poetic and pathetic figure of my cousin Abhi, who acted superbly and sang so sweetly in *Māyār Khelā*, and died so young and full of promise.

Unfortunately, I have to rely on hearsay in these matters, as I do not happen to be old enough to be able to recall any details regarding the performances of the above four pieces

except the bare facts already mentioned. My recollection goes back only to the early days of the Asrama, when Father began to write plays suitable for being staged by the teachers and students of Santiniketan. They are therefore a class by themselves, a distinct departure from his previous dramas, which were romantic and psychological in treatment. The three plays—*Sāradsab*, *Achalāyatan* and *Phālguni*—may be classified as belonging to the Santiniketan series. Apart from their intrinsic value and distinctive flavour, they have an added interest inasmuch as they form a link between the classical series (*Rājā-o-Rāni* and *Bisarjan*) and the allegorical if not mystic series of dramas that followed—*Dāk-ghar*, *Rājā*, *Tapati*, etc. Although in the Santiniketan series of plays the theme is simple, an allegorical treatment of the whole subject has crept in. Another characteristic, born of necessity, is the complete absence of female characters in these three plays.

I should think the tradition of play acting at Santiniketan had its beginning even before *Sāradsab* was written, when *Bisarjan* was staged by the Asrama in the winter of 1902. We had at that time neither any stage nor any of the paraphernalia connected with it. But the want of worldly goods was amply compensated for by ardour and enthusiasm. There were very few students then, so the three of us—Santosh Majumdar, Nayan Chatterji and myself—had to take some of the leading parts. But as the rehearsals progressed the teachers got alarmed and complained to Father that if the project were not dropped at once there was no chance of our passing the Entrance Examination which was drawing near. But our joy knew no bounds when Father turned a deaf ear to their importunities and the rehearsals continued merrily as before. I may mention here that such opposition from teachers recurred ever since with monotonous regularity, only to be met with the inevitable fate it deserved from Father.

The ramshackle shed behind the Library, used as the dining hall, was selected for the stage and auditorium. Although for the making of the stage there were only a few rickety bedsteads, an artist from Calcutta was requisitioned to paint the scenes. He had a facile brush and could wield it to produce bizarre effects, not unlike the painted rags used for scenes, the stock-in-trade of professional touring theatres. The man was something of a

character and was universally known by his Bengali initials 'Ha-Cha-Ha'. He figured in many a story that went the round of our Jorasanko houses, and I believe cousin Gaganendranath drew a caricature of him. He has also figured in one of the stories in Father's *Galpa-Salpa*. But as youngsters, far from being amused, we were duly impressed by his florid art and got busy setting up the stage. The cots were hauled in from the dormitory and Ha-Cha-Ha's backgrounds were solemnly hung up. Despite the crude setting, the performance was not unsuccessful. It at least helped Father to pick out some promising material from amongst the amateur actors. Nayan was splendid as Nakshatramanikya. A very gifted actor, he unfortunately did not live long enough to help Father in the staging of his later plays. Jagadananda Babu, who appeared in the role of Raghupati, was of course marked out immediately as an asset. He was never spared from any performances as long as he lived.

When *Sāradotsab* was produced the character of the Asrama had changed considerably. A new dormitory had been built with a spacious hall which lent itself so well for performances that it became known as the Natyaghar. It was not much of a hall, with its low ceiling; but it seemed a great improvement on the dining shed. There were about a hundred students and the staff too had increased proportionately. So there were lots of people to choose from and the cast was of a much higher standard. Kshitimohan Sen, Ajit Chakravarty, Pramatha Bisi and Tapan Chatterji were valuable additions. Father himself selected the actors after putting them through hard tests. In those days he preferred to hold the rehearsals in an open place and did not mind the whole Asrama looking on and listening. As a result, the rehearsals of plays and of music were of great educative value to the whole community and not to the participants only. I am sure this was the most effective method by which Father was able to infuse the whole Asrama with the spirit of art and music. There were no regular classes for the teaching of music, and yet almost everybody could sing; music was in the air as it has ever been since. I do not wish to claim that everybody could act as well, nevertheless it is true that in a very short time Father had a large assortment of talent to draw upon, whenever he wanted to produce a play. It is a pity that this open-air system of holding rehearsals had to be discarded

later on when the Asrama lost its homogeneity and visitors became frequent. Our students could no longer profit by watching the intensive process of training the amateur actors underwent under Father's direct guidance.

*Sāradotsab* breathed the spirit of Santiniketan and its setting idealised the character of its surrounding landscape in the autumn. Those who took part in the play found such kinship with the parts they were rendering that they came quite natural to them. The audience, a few of whom had come from Calcutta on invitation, were charmed with the spontaneity and *joie de vivre* that characterised the acting.

Father felt greatly encouraged by the success of *Sāradotsab*, which was followed by *Prāyaschitta*, *Rājā* and *Achalāyatan* in rapid succession. It became almost a custom to get up a performance at the end of each term. More and more friends were attracted from Calcutta to come and see them. It was a problem to accommodate them. Father used to get quite excited and would worry himself over the details of the arrangements made for their comfort.

*Prāyaschitta* is the dramatised version of the novel *Bouthākūrānir Hāt* and as such is one of Father's earliest productions and yet, strangely enough, it had never before been put on the stage. The success of the performance at Santiniketan therefore greatly pleased him. This perhaps explains the somewhat odd juxtaposition of this play between *Sāradotsab* and *Achalāyatan* which belong to such an entirely different school of drama. *Prāyaschitta* also happens to be one of those plays which have been remodelled several times and printed under different names.

When *Rājā* was staged in 1911, I was staying at Shelidah and could not be present. The performance was of a high order. Father had achieved the most difficult task of getting together and training a group of artists, who could not only give him able support but were infused with a common spirit. Such a happy combination rarely occurs and I know of only the Moscow Art Theatre and the Irish Theatre movements which can be compared with it. In both of these enterprises, as at Santiniketan, it was not the individual artist so much as the effect produced by the spirit that moved the whole group of actors which impressed the audience and convinced them of the sincerity of the effort and gave them complete artistic satisfaction.

In *Rājā* the audience was enthralled by the artistic nature of the performance, but there was some confusion with regard to the meaning of the play in their minds. As a matter of fact this feeling prevailed in the literary coteries in Calcutta for several years, and the impression gathered strength that dramas written by Father during this period did not conform to the prevailing literary standards, that their symbolism was confusing and, above all, that they lacked dramatic movement. Repeated performances, more than anything else, proved to be the best answer to this criticism.

*Achalāyatan* was staged at Santiniketan in 1914 on the occasion of a reception given to C. F. Andrews. Both *Sāradotsab* and *Achalāyatan* gave scope not only to grown-up actors but to the young pupils as well. The natural ease with which these two groups mingled on the stage was largely due to the healthy relationship that existed between the teachers and students at Santiniketan. Jagadananda Babu again scored a hit as Mahāpanchak, and so did Dinendranath, who became indispensable not only as actor but as leader of the choir. Kshitimohan Sen's appearance on the stage as Thakurda was greatly appreciated. Father had taken the part of Acharya. What gave a piquancy to the occasion was the inclusion of W. W. Pearson amongst the Sonpangsu crowd. His otherwise perfect Bengali stumbled on the words *Aar khensarir dāl* and this produced a ripple of laughter amongst the audience. Father liked foreigners who came to live at Santiniketan to share in all our activities. He took special care to find a place for them in the performances. Therefore it is not surprising that W. W. Pearson, Leonard Elmhirst, Dr. and Mrs. Harry Timbres, Haimanti Chakravarty and many others have appeared on the stage on different occasions.

The first of the series of performances which became a regular feature in the social and cultural life of Calcutta for many years was *Phālguni*. The play was first staged at Santiniketan soon after it was written in the spring of 1915. To those who heard the singing of *Ogo dakhin hāwā* (O South Wind) by two of the youngest boys of the Asrama, every return of spring will bring back the memory of their fresh sweet voices. To harmonise with the spirit of the play, which was different in subject matter and in technique from the ordinary kind of drama, the stage-settings and the decor had necessarily to break away from the current

traditions. In all the three plays—*Sāradotsab*, *Achalāyatan* and *Phālguni*—when staged at Santiniketan painted scenes had been discarded. Naturalistic settings had been introduced without any definite attempt at artistry. *Phālguni* gave a better scope to this kind of stage than the other two plays. The setting was an elaborate garden with real trees, flowers and rustic seats with a swing thrown in. Draperies came at a later stage, when attempts to introduce artistic effects became more conscious on the part of those who took up the responsibility of stage-decoration.

Towards the end of winter in the following year (1916), immediately after *Māghotsab*, when as usual Father had conducted the divine service and Santiniketan boys had been taken down to sing in the choir, it was decided to repeat the performance of *Phālguni* in Calcutta. The dire need of helping the famine-stricken people of Bankura made Father hurry on with the rehearsals, so that the proceeds of the performance could be sent to the Relief Committee.

At that time I was staying in Calcutta carrying on the work of the Vichitra Club, and naturally the management of the performance fell on my shoulders. Santiniketan was giving a public performance for the first time. The great responsibility of such an undertaking, added to my inexperience, made me extremely nervous, particularly on the first day when the box-office opened with hardly any appreciable sale of tickets. That evening I gathered together a bunch of our old boys who were then scattered in different colleges in Calcutta, and told them to spread the news to those of their friends who wanted to see the play that they must get the tickets the first thing next morning. As a result, there was rush for places on the following day and every seat was sold, although the prices were unusually high. On the evening of the performance people paid as much as Rs. 100/- for standing-room. We were able to send Rs. 8000/- to the Relief Committee after all the expenses had been paid. Although all our subsequent public performances have been well patronised, *Phālguni*, I believe, still holds the record as far as box-office returns are concerned.

Father's creative mind could never find pleasure in repetition. Invariably he would make alterations and additions to the plays whenever they were about to be performed. Such modifications would continue till the last day of the rehearsals and even in

between successive nights of the performance much to the consternation of the actors. It would have made a most interesting collection if all the stage-copies of the plays had been preserved.

It was therefore quite to be expected that *Phālguni* as staged in Calcutta would be different from what was performed at Santiniketan a year back. At the last moment, while the rehearsals were still going on, he wrote a prelude called *Bairāgya-Sādhan*, which required an entirely new set of actors. The reason for writing this piece of introduction was possibly his apprehension that the public might not readily understand the significance of the new style of drama he was going to present to them. It may also have been that he wished to draw upon the histrionic talents of his nephews Gaganendra, Samarendra and Abanindranath. The parts seemed to have been specially designed to suit their talents. What an ornamental and romantic background this by-play gave to the whole piece!

The stage was set up in the courtyard of our family house. Nandalal Bose and Surendranath Kar, under the guidance of Gaganendranath, helped with the scenic representations. With only a few touches of realism here and there, the setting of the stage was mainly suggestive—a definite advance on the naturalistic get-up so far attempted at Santiniketan. The scene that moved the audience most deeply was the figure of the blind Baul moving towards the dark cave singing *Dhire Bandhugo Dhire*. In 1916 Father still had a resonant voice and as he disappeared behind the scenes, his voice dying away with the last words, the audience could hardly control themselves. The songs are the life of this play, and the singing on this occasion was superb, with Father, Dinendranath, Ajit Chakravarty and the choir of Santiniketan boys as performers. I do not think I have ever heard Ajit Chakravarty sing so well as he did that evening, specially the song *Āmi jābo nā go Amni Chole*. The success of this performance in Calcutta left no doubt in Father's mind as to the standard reached by the Santiniketan school of actors. Its financial possibilities had also been discovered.

There is a long gap of several years before *Phālguni* was followed by any other performance on a public stage by the Santiniketan party of actors. This was perhaps due to the demands made upon Father by the Vichitra Club in Calcutta which had been started about this time, followed by his absence



in Europe for a long period. In 1917 he was busy rehearsing the play *Dāk-ghar* (*The Post Office*), this time not at Santiniketan but in Calcutta. Santiniketan contributed one of its youngest students to take the part of Amal; otherwise most of the characters were selected from Calcutta and the rehearsals as well as the performances were held at the Vichitra Hall. The play *Dāk-ghar* is almost lyrical in quality, its mystic philosophy lies concealed in very simple and poetic language. It is short and the characters are few. No word in it is redundant and not a sentence without significance. Only true artists and accomplished actors can do justice to this play. And such a group, all of whom seemed perfectly fitted for the parts they played, was luckily found without difficulty. Father naturally chose the parts of Gaffer Watchman and the Fakir for himself, and Abanindranath took the dual part of Physician and Village Headman, while Gaganendranath appeared as Madhab, Dinendranath as the Fakir's companion and Asit Halder as the Curd-seller. The choice of the boy Ashamukul as Amal was providential; he seemed to have been born for that part. The only feminine character in the drama—the little playmate of Amal—was acted with perfection by Abanindranath's youngest daughter. Her last plaintive call for Amal when he lay dead with the long expected letter of the Postman in his hands, closed the drama with a pathos that perhaps the author himself had not dared to conceive possible.

The stage was set up at one end of the Vichitra Hall, leaving enough room for only about one hundred and fifty persons to make the audience. The arrangement could not have been better. Many of the delicate nuances of the play would have been lost in a less intimate atmosphere. The conception of the stage was entirely Gaganendranath's. It was novel and daring. A cottage with a real thatched roof and bamboo walls was erected by him on the stage platform. The decorations were simple but artistic as only the eye of a connoisseur could select and apply with sure effect.

The performance was meant to be a private show for the benefit of the members of the Vichitra Club, but it was such a unique treat and people were so eager to see it that it had to be repeated several times. After every show when I wanted to pull down the stage, a demand was made for another repeat perfor-

mance and thus Amal's three-walled cottage remained a fixture in the Vichitra Hall for many weeks. I believe the seventh and last performance was given for the entertainment of the delegates of the Indian National Congress then being held in Calcutta. After the session of the Congress had concluded all the distinguished members including the grand old lady-President, Mrs. Annie Besant, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Mahatma Gandhi, and Lokmanya Tilak came to see the play at our house. From the point of view of dramatic representation, I can unhesitatingly say that no other play so far attempted ever gave such complete satisfaction to the author, the producers, actors and the audience. The combination of histrionic art and stage-craft had for once reached an acme of perfection.



### *Pareshnath*

Vichitra held me in Calcutta for a few years until the call from Santiniketan could not be resisted and I had to go and settle down there for good. There was a brief interval, however, when fresh from the social and intellectual activities of the Vichitra I sought a wholesale change of environment and occupation. I plunged into a business enterprise, a motor engineering concern, which, true to family tradition, did not prove a financial success. But as long as it lasted it gave me some satisfaction in that the business afforded me the pleasure of indulging in my hobby—motoring. I had a passion for speed and for trying out new models of cars. The business gave me plenty of excuse to go on frequent motoring trips. Chotanagpur became a favourite haunt. This part of the country was still wild and unspoiled. Its innumerable hills and undulating valleys, its rivers, which became rushing torrents during the rains and trickling streams of sparkingly clear water in the dry season, its extensive Sal and Mohua forests alive with wild animals—greatly attracted me.

Foolishly wandering about in the dry undulating plains of this country during one summer, and getting boiled in the process, we could not help putting on the brakes as the refreshingly green peak of the Pareshnath hill rose in front of us. This solitary hill rising suddenly to four thousand feet amidst scattered hillocks, which seem but pygmies in comparison, is an anomaly for which I do not know if local geologists have a ready explanation, but certainly it baffles the mind of any traveller who happens to pass within its range. It rises clear above the surrounding plains to a sharp point with only one break, an elongated spur towards its base. For majestic beauty it can

hardly be beaten, its solitariness defying any attempt at comparison. And yet the proportions are so nicely balanced that to an unwary wayfarer the top seems within easy reach. At least it did not deter us from dismounting from the car and, without any preparation whatsoever, straightway beginning the climb.

The Jain priest in the *dharamshala*, where the footpath took its first leap up through the tropical jungle covering the lower ridges, must have felt amused at the nonchalant daring of these tourists, but it did not prevent him from doing a kindly act in offering us a papaya as large as a water-melon. The gift hardly provoked a smile of gratitude from the recipients at the time, and the burden was accepted with the minimum grace demanded by the exigencies of etiquette. His afterthought, and an act of undoubted piety as it turned out to be, in sending after us four coolies with a charpoy for my wife, the only lady of the party, was more appreciated.

Up and up we climbed through the jungle. The papaya was soon consumed. A few pilgrims hurrying back to reach the monastery in the valley below before darkness set in, warned us of the difficulties in store for us. An old woman caught hold of my hands and with tears in her eyes begged of us to desist from such a foolhardy adventure. But young blood would listen to no such warnings. Soon we four, with the coolies, were the only human species left with the ancient moss-covered Sal trees towering above our heads, as the sun in a haze of amber-coloured dust slowly dipped below the horizon in a distant valley of the Hazaribagh district. As darkness set in, indefinable noises of the hidden night life of the forest filtered through to our ears. To drown their fears an occasional cry of 'Ram, Ram' from the doolie-bearers would go forth into the empty sky and not even an echo would be heard to reassure them. Worn out and subdued in spirit, at last we reached the pilgrims' rest house on a narrow ridge beneath the summit. The house was securely locked. Some dry grass and a few logs kept a fire going outside in a clearing and we lay down and slept till the rays of the morning sun mercilessly beat on our drowsy eyelids and roused us. There we were perched on the top of the world—but still higher rose the spire of the marble temple of Pareshnath, the Saint whom the Jains worship, glittering in the sun.

We dragged our aching limbs across the long flight of steps eager to see the riches of the temple hall. We stepped into a room spotlessly clean, devoid of any gaudiness, dazzling in its chaste whiteness like a widow after her morning bath, empty except for a book of sayings of the holy man. Thus we were left alone in that empty hall in the seclusion of a solitary mountain peak, every stone of which was a mute but irrefutable witness to man's ever-ascending spiritual aspiration.

### *Giridih*

The Pareshnath episode had left a lasting impression on my mind. It was probably the lure of this solitary peak which led my steps to the neighbouring town of Giridih years later for spending a long vacation.

Amongst my old letters which a kind friend had copied out and sent me I found one dealing with this coal and mica town. As a piece of description with plenty of local colour the following extracts might be of some interest :

Giridih

Sept. 1, 1936

My dear Mrs. Seymour,

Our villa is on the edge of a little town quite in the centre of the mining district of Bihar. A ridge separates the residential part from the coalfields and the mica mines are further away in the hills. A turbulent hill stream winds along at the bottom of the slope on which our house rests and skirting a bare granite mound is lost to view. Patches of red laterite, barely covered by grass, intervene between the hill and the stream. And wherever the land is broken by water-courses, terraces of young rice—shades of pale yellow and emerald green—climb down to the edge of the water. In the distance beyond the river are clumps of dark green mango trees, arranged as in a park, on a wide stretch of rolling ground. On this bank at the top of the ridge, where the ricefields end, not daring to go any higher, is a forest with tall and slim Sal trees, defying with aristocratic indifference the vandalism of mean-minded men. I can see some white specks on the uninviting boulders and rocks—undoubtedly the nimble-footed cows of the village nestling on the slope of the hill, vainly trying to pick a few blades of grass and looking despairingly on the lusciously green rice plants below. Right in front of

me a man with a primitive plough and a pair of patient buffaloes is going round and round on a tiny plot which looks hardly larger than a praying carpet from here. On another terrace which has just been ploughed a man is sowing seeds,—a typical Millet composition.

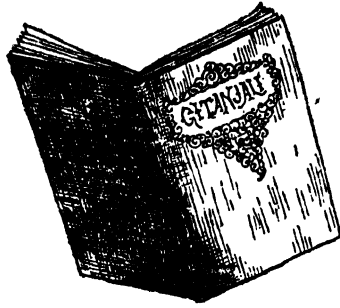
From the verandah I gaze upon this landscape every day—the sharp bend of the river with the muddy stream passing between silvery sand-banks thrown up on each side; the solitary rock standing in the background like a monument, celebrating no hero of any sanguine battle but a mere whim of nature; the peaceful ricefields descending by easy steps the undulating ground; and the stately Sal trees standing there like sentinels on the watch—but how changeful, never the same any hour of the day, subtle changes for the eyes only of the patient observer and the lover of beauty! A bright morning sun dazzles the eye with the contrast of brilliant colours in the foreground while the faint horizon glimmers in the distance. In a moment a passing cloud completely changes the value of colours and gives an intimate feeling bringing everything—the hills and the trees and the river—so close to oneself. A woman with an earthen pot poised carelessly on her head walks along the zigzag paths to the river-side, quite unconscious of the interest she creates.

As we are on the fringe of the settlement, we can enjoy all this. But when we go to see some friends in the heart of the town we find nothing but brick and mortar houses of all descriptions—pigeon-hole, match-box, X'mas-cake-like ugly structures crowded together neck to neck along narrow lanes surrounded by solid walls, giving an unmistakable appearance of a big jail to the whole town. And these jail-khanas, we are told, are the pleasure houses of the worried people of Calcutta seeking refuge in the peace of the countryside!

Another day we go further and penetrate into the business quarter and the mining area that lies behind the town. Doing formerly a brisk business in coal and mica there are plenty of Marwaris, living huddled together in mean-looking quarters with filth and dirt around them. Land is fairly cheap here but they are parsimonious of God's light and air just as they are of more material objects. Crossing the main railway line which spreads out its tentacles in every direction wherever a derrick is visible, we come right into the coal area. Hills and valleys with rivulets running through them are still there but gone are the Sal forests. How enchanting the country must have looked then! The Sal trees have been replaced by ugly derricks, now mostly abandoned, chimneys belching out smoke and pumps converting every depression into dirty quagmires. There are not many persons to be seen here, but, I understand there is a whole population of nearly ten thousand who never see the sun, sweating below ground in grime and coal dust during the day time and coming up when

it is dark only to drown their miserable existence in drink.

We return home with a sigh of relief. Relief? Yes, but we wonder why the smiling ricefields against the sombre background of the Sal forest or the laughing rivulet embracing the dark rocky hill, no longer bring the same joy to our eyes and soothe the mind as before.



### *With Father in London*

After the passing away of my mother in 1902 Father took very little care of his health. He wrote incessantly, very often skipping meals in order to gain more time for literary work. Moreover, at this period, he plunged for a few years into a variety of public activities, mainly political. Temperamentally he was unsuited for such work, it jarred on him and eventually brought on a reaction. Besides these there were the many petty demands made upon him by the Santiniketan school. The worries of a growing educational institution taxed not only his time and energy but his slender financial resources as well. As a result of this strain, his health began to deteriorate, and in spite of the legacy of a splendid constitution, it broke down during the year 1912. Doctors and friends prevailed upon him to take a long sea-voyage and visit Europe for treatment and an operation, if necessary.

Passages were obtained on a boat sailing from Calcutta to London. The evening before the boat sailed there was a party at Sir Ashutosh Chaudhuri's palatial residence, where a performance of Father's operatic play *Bālmiki Pratibhā* was given. Preparations had been going on for a long time and Dinendra-nath had been chosen to play the part of Balmiki. Father, of course, had to be present. We came back late at night. Instead of going to bed Father sat down to write letters for the remainder of the night. In the early hours of the morning we found him to our dismay on the verge of collapse. Doctors had to be hurriedly summoned. All our luggage had been sent on to the boat the previous evening. A big crowd of friends had gathered at the Chandpal Ghat jetty to see him off. Their sur-



prise could well be imagined when the boat left with our belongings but the owners were not to be seen.

I believe Father did not relish the idea of having to undertake a voyage to Europe at the bidding of doctors and resisted in his own way our attempts to persuade him to do so. This was not the first and only incident of the kind. His reaction to any kind of authoritative suggestion took peculiar and sometimes humorous turns. Many an interesting story might be told by people who have come up against the quite unexpected streak of stubbornness in Father's nature.

After his serious illness the doctors insisted that Father should take a complete rest and try to improve his health before undertaking the journey to Europe. Father could think of no better place for recouping his health and spirit than Shelidah—his favourite retreat of earlier years. As he was forbidden any strenuous intellectual work, he thought it would be enjoyable to occupy his time by trying to translate some of his poems into English. The immediate incentive, if I remember aright, came from encouraging remarks made by Ramsay MacDonald, to whom, during his visit to Santiniketan a few months earlier, translations of a few stray writings that had appeared in the *Modern Review* were shown by Ajit Kumar Chakravarty—then a teacher at Santiniketan. Previous to this Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Jagadish Chandra Bose had also encouraged Father to have his works translated into English.

Father was very glad to have the opportunity of returning to Shelidah. At the time he did not, of course, realise that this would be practically his last visit. I think he did pay another visit many years later, but not for long. However, this time he went there alone, and had the Kuthibari all to himself. He would pass the whole day in the tiny study perched on the roof of the house from where he had an uninterrupted view on one side, of field after field of mustard in blossom shining like molten gold and filling the air with its sweet fragrance, and on the other side, of vast stretches of sand-banks with the silvery water of the majestic Padma now shrunken into a thin streak. There was no one to disturb the quiet of such peaceful pastoral surroundings except an occasional visit from a Vaishnavi<sup>1</sup> whom

<sup>1</sup> A female devotee belonging to the Vaishnava sect.

he has immortalized in *Sadhana* and other writings. The ease with which this illiterate woman talked about philosophy and religion and her simple and devout faith moved Father deeply.

This return to the haunt of the best years of his creative life and the pleasant languor of convalescence stimulated by his conversations with the Vaishnavi must have had something to do with the selection of the poems and also with the manner of rendering them into English. The English version of *Gitanjali* is not, as many suppose it is, a poem for poem translation of the original Bengali book of that name. The translation draws upon ten different books although about half the poems are from the Bengali *Gitanjali* itself. It was the utter simplicity of the language in the English translation subtle in its artlessness which, I believe, moved Yeats so strongly. I have a feeling that the English translation reflects in some strange way the spirit of those days that he spent at Shelidah. It is as though the poems were reborn in another garb; they were not mere translations.

Father returned from Shelidah somewhat improved in health and we made another attempt to take him to England. This time we did succeed and embarked on a P and O boat from Bombay on May 27, 1912. Although on my way home from the U.S.A. I had spent some time in Europe I hardly knew the country and my wife was making her first voyage abroad. So, we made a very inefficient pair of companions to Father on this journey. Our responsibilities were made heavier by having to chaperon a student of Santiniketan going to Harvard for his education. Fresh from school, his unconventional manners were a source of much worry and embarrassment to all of us. Shoes were a constant source of irritation to him—he would very often cast them off and walk about the deck on bare feet as he was used to at Santiniketan. Knives and forks to him had much better utility than for eating. His excitement knew no bounds when one afternoon while everybody was having a nap he spied a woman entering Father's cabin and helping herself to some mangoes. Knowing that Father was very fond of mangoes we had brought a basket of Alfonsos and these were kept in his cabin. The delicious smell coming out of the open door must have proved too tempting to the lady.

After the usual uninteresting life on a steamer, we found ourselves one evening in London. Thos. Cook had arranged

rooms for us in a Bloomsbury hotel. We took the Tube from Charing Cross station. This was our first experience of underground travelling and it left us completely bewildered. I was carrying my father's attaché case, which contained among other papers the manuscript of the English translations later published as *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*. When on the next day Father wanted to call on William Rothenstein and asked for the manuscript, the leather case was found to be missing. With my heart in my mouth I hastened to the Left Luggage Office. One can imagine my relief, when at last I discovered the lost property there. Since then I have often wondered what shape the course of events might have taken if the manuscript of *Gitanjali* had been lost through my negligence.

We felt stranded and lonely in London, as most foreigners do on visiting that seemingly inhospitable city for the first time. We have never during our subsequent extensive travels experienced such a feeling of being complete outcasts in any other part of the world, as we did in those days, living in the midst of the teeming millions of this British capital. But London grows on one with years. We even came to like its outwardly drab and uninteresting atmosphere in time. The first few weeks, however, were extremely painful to one so sensitive to his surroundings as Father was. This was not his first visit to England. As a student he had lived in London. He had also spent a four-month 'furlough' with my second uncle and Loken Palit in 1890. But it was such a long time ago that all associations had completely faded from his memory and no former acquaintances could be traced. We hardly knew anybody except Mr. Rothenstein, whom Father had met when he was in Calcutta about a year before. He warmly welcomed us and soon began to introduce Father to artists and literary friends of his. Although an artist, Rothenstein had a very wide circle of friends amongst the literary circles in England. He had at one time or another drawn or painted most of the people that counted in politics, art, or literature. Moreover, he was a brilliant conversationalist, which helped to attract intellectuals to him. Father had simply to mention such names as Yeats, Masfield, H. G. Wells, Stopford Brooke, Hudson, Nevinson, Evelyn Underhill, and in a few days he would find himself sitting with them over the lunch or tea-table. Very often Father would be asked to the studio where,

while Rothenstein painted, Father would talk with his sitters. This was how he met Colonel Lawrence of Arabia, before the latter became such a romantic figure. Rothenstein at this time had received a commission from the Government to paint some large-size Indian scenes for the House of Commons. As the principal standing figure in a representation of the Banaras Ghats, he had selected Kalimohan Ghose from Santiniketan who was visiting England at the time, and whose profile he greatly admired.

London was then truly the hub of the intellectual and artistic life of England and Hampstead Heath a regular colony of writers and artists. The aftermath of the Victorian period was still producing men of no mean order. There was an atmosphere of intellectual virility, artistic endeavour and in general an optimistic outlook. The English people were supposed to be looking after the welfare of the world and therefore everything seemed to go well. Political, social and economic problems were faced with fearless confidence, even with complacency. The world was theirs, and it was soon to be turned into a paradise. A fantastic dream, no doubt, and how unreal was soon to be proved, but yet a dream that moved their best men to sincere and ardent efforts with an enthusiasm that one could not help admiring.

The historic evening at Rothenstein's, when Yeats read out the *Gitanjali* poems in his musical, ecstatic voice to a choice group of people like Ernest Rhys, Alice Meynell, Henry Nevinson, Ezra Pound, May Sinclair, Charles Trevelyan, C. F. Andrews and others gathered in the drawing-room; the almost painful silence that followed the recitation; the flood of appreciative letters that poured in the next day; the developments that led to the publication of the book by the India Society—that beautiful edition which very soon afterwards fetched high prices at Christie's; and the immediate acceptance of Father as one of the greatest poets of the age by the English public are well-known. It may, however, be interesting to record here the impressions of C. F. Andrews who wrote :

I walked back along the side of Hampstead Heath with H. W. Nevinson but spoke very little. I wanted to be alone and think in silence of the wonder and glory of it all. When I had left Nevinson I went across the Heath. The night was cloudless and there was something of the purple of the Indian atmosphere

about the sky. There all alone I could think of the wonder of it :

On the seashore of endless worlds, children meet

On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

It was the haunting, haunting melody of the English, so simple, like all the beautiful sounds of my childhood, that carried me completely away. I remained out under the sky far into the night, almost till dawn was breaking.

The room where we were seated looked out upon the myriad evening lights of the great city of London which lay below...I sat at the window in the dusk of the long summer evening as Rabindranath's poems were read slowly one by one...I remember how immeasurably happy I was that night as I went away. The new wine of Rabindranath's poetry had intoxicated me. I had only seen tiny extracts before ; but the recital which I had heard that evening was the full measure, pure and undiluted. It was an experience something not unlike that of Keats', when he came for the first time upon Chapman's translation of Homer,—

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken.

Of the many appreciative letters that came to Father immediately following the reading of his poems by Yeats I am quoting below only one—a letter from the well-known writer Miss May Sinclair :

4 Edwardes Sqr. Studios

Kensington

July 8, 1912.

Dear Mr. Tagore,

It was impossible for me to say anything to you about your poems last night, because they are of a kind not easily spoken about. May I say now that as long as I live, even if I were never to hear them again, I shall never forget the impression that they made. It is not only that they have an absolute beauty, a perfection as poetry, but that they have made present for me forever the divine thing that I can only find by flashes and with an agonizing uncertainty. I don't know whether it is possible to *see* through another's eyes, I am afraid it is not ; but I am sure that it is possible to believe through another's certainty.

There is nothing to compare with what you have done except the poem of St. John of the Cross : 'The Dark Night of the Soul' and you surpass him and all Christian poets of Mysticism that I know by that sense of the Absolute, that metaphysical insight. It, to my mind, Christian mysticism almost completely

lacks. It deals too much in sensual imagery, it is not sufficiently austere and subtle—it has not really *seen through* the illusion of the world. And therefore its passion is not and cannot be entirely pure.

At least so it has always seemed to me, and that is why finding this imperfection in it, it sends me away still unsatisfied.

Now it is satisfaction—this flawless satisfaction—you gave me last night. You have put into English which is absolutely transparent in its perfection things it is despaired of ever seeing written in English at all or in any Western language.

I am rejoiced to learn that the Poems are to be published here in the autumn.

With kind regards,

Sincerely yours,  
May Sinclair.

We had in the meantime moved to a boarding-house in South Kensington kept by two Belgian sisters. We had had enough of the roast beef, boiled cabbage, Yorkshire pudding and gooseberry tart, which appear with monotonous regularity in English hotels. The place was quite near the Indian Students' Hostel in Cromwell Road. This gave the opportunity to many of our students to have easy access to Father. Amongst them were quite a few who have since made their mark in life, and now hold important positions. But the one who was the life and soul of the party—Sukumar Ray—a process engraver by profession but far better known as a humorist and writer—is no more.

Besides the Rothensteins in London, there were the Havells. Mr. Havell had been Principal of the Art School in Calcutta and the *guru* of my cousin Abanindranath. After retirement, although his home was in Denmark, he was living in London where he had already earned recognition as an authority on Indian Art. It was mainly through his efforts that the India Society was founded, and he was, if I am not mistaken, its first Secretary. Havell's object in starting the Society was to assert the claims of Indian Art in England and to win the support of the India Office in giving employment to Indian artists. Just then came a unique opportunity. New Delhi was going to be built. Havell was determined that Indian artists should plan it according to pure Indian Art traditions and prevent, if possible, the erection of a hybrid city. He tried to enlist the support

of the artists and art-critics of England, through the India Society. But Havell in his enthusiasm for Indian Art had not taken into account the business instinct of the British people. Strong forces were arrayed behind Sir Edward Lutyens. In spite of his admiration for Indian Art, William Rothenstein and his group went over to the other side and the India Society, as a result of this defection, became henceforth a subservient organisation of the India Office. Havell in protest severed his connection with it. No one seemed to mind.

The picturesque figure of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, prominent in most social gatherings in London during this period, added to the charm of the artistic—I would not say Bohemian—life of the city. He was much in demand for giving talks—and he could talk fluently and impressively on any subject dealing with Art; but it was not so much his erudition as his tall and handsome appearance that made him attractive.

William Butler Yeats was another whose striking figure would never fail to draw the eyes of everybody in any gathering. Even in a crowd he carried an air of impenetrable aloofness with him without, however, seeming snobbish or haughty. This gave him a great distinction. I felt this aloofness when I saw him for the first time in a drawing-room and dared not approach him. But soon afterwards I had the opportunity of knowing him rather well and was charmed by his genial personality. He used to live in a garret over the shop of a shoemaker in Woburn Place, near Russell Square. My friend Kalimohan Ghose and I spent many an evening with Yeats in this quaint retreat, talking about ghosts and spirits till the long hours of the night. We always carried back the impression that Yeats lived and had his being in a world of imagination, a fairy world which was very real to him. It was difficult to believe he was a Westerner.

One day we were surprised when Sir Oliver Lodge called at our South Kensington boarding-house and introduced himself to Father. It was amusing to me to find this eminent scientist questioning Father on the belief of re-incarnation prevalent in India. He had given up by that time all his interest in science and was devoting himself entirely to spiritualism.

One more visitor was Bertrand Russell. He also turned up suddenly and had to introduce himself since Father had never met him. He told Father that he had come down from Cam-

bridge specially to see him, and then without any further attempt at conversation abruptly asked him, 'Tagore, what is Beauty?' The question came so suddenly that Father kept silent for a minute and then explained his ideas on aesthetics which he later developed in 'What is Art' in his book *Creative Unity*. I could not judge whether Father's exposition satisfied Bertrand Russell because after listening with rapt attention he left just as suddenly as he had come.

While Father was constantly meeting new personages, Kalimohan Ghose and I divided our leisure hours between the two poets, Yeats and Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound was unique, a class by himself. He took the business of poetry seriously and was proud and conscious of being a poet who had succeeded in casting away the fetters and conventions of his fellow craftsmen. There was undoubtedly a good deal of the *poseur* in him, yet we could not help liking him. His American nationality, of which he was not at all proud, perhaps accounted for his naïve simplicity and warm-heartedness. He became devoted to Father, and looked upon him as a master.

Of all contemporary English writers Father had the most tender regard for W. H. Hudson. Years ago when my sister and I could hardly understand English, Father used to read to us from Hudson's books of travel. His favourite books were *The Naturalist in La Plata* and *Green Mansions*. Rothenstein shared his love for Hudson, and it was not difficult to arrange a meeting. We were not present there, but when he came back Father told us a most moving story about this writer which helped us to understand the passionate love for nature that characterizes all his writings. Hudson's intense love for music led him to marry an accomplished violinist. He used to be deeply moved whenever she played to him. The tragedy came when after marriage his wife refused to touch her violin again. Hudson was bitterly disappointed, but this did not deter him from nursing his wife after she became an invalid with great tenderness and devotion for years. The love that was not returned by the only human being he cared for was deflected with a passionate intensity towards wild nature, still unspoiled by man. Father's admiration for this unusual writer increased considerably after he came into personal contact with him.

One evening we were all invited to a dinner given by Miss



May Sinclair. It was a fairly large gathering of well-known writers. Father was seated next to Bernard Shaw. Conversation flowed around the table with sparkling brilliance, but to the surprise of everybody Shaw hardly opened his mouth. Father had to do all the talking. We were told Shaw had never kept so silent anywhere before. Our next meeting with him was at the Queen's Hall where we went to hear the violinist Heifetz. At the end of the concert, as we were making our exit through the jostling crowd, somebody suddenly caught hold of Father and turning him round quietly announced, 'Do you remember me? I am Bernard Shaw', and walked away.

The Suffragette Movement was at its height. My wife became interested in it and attended many of their meetings. One night she was late in returning from a meeting. We wondered whether she had also been breaking shop-windows and been marched off to a police station. When at last she came home, she told us a story about Shaw which was characteristically Shavian. Everybody knew that Shaw was a staunch supporter of the Suffragette Movement. Very early that morning an unknown person had come to Adelphi Terrace, roused Shaw from his bed and told him excitedly that he must have £100 immediately to bail out Miss Pankhurst, who had been arrested. The money was paid without hesitation. When afterwards it was discovered that the whole thing had been a fraud and that he had been cheated, Shaw consoled himself by saying, 'The man, of course, deserved the money. He has proved that there is at least one person who is cleverer than Bernard Shaw.'

In Ernest Rhys Father found a genuine friend. Rhys would quite often walk into our rooms unobtrusively on his way back from Dents' and with a broad grin on his heavily bearded face sit down and talk literature with encyclopaedic knowledge and discerning judgment. We too would often visit his simple but beautifully kept cottage in Golders Green, sit sipping *sherbet* in the garden, and listen to the piano which he played with much feeling. Mrs. Rhys was a devoted mother and an amiable hostess and they had a pair of charming children. Very often the whole family would gather round Father, and ask him to sing the *Gitanjali* songs. They were Welsh, and even after their long residence in London they had lost none of their racial characteristics. Music is in the blood of the Celtic race, and therefore

it was not surprising that they could appreciate Father's songs, though the music was foreign. A friend of the family—Dr. Walford Davis, who afterwards became a well-known composer—used to come sometimes to take down notations of the Bengali tunes from Father.

Thomas Sturge Moore was a young poet when Father first met him. Although he never earned a great reputation, and remained one of the minor poets, he had a wonderful feeling for words and a keen sense of rhythm. Father very often discussed with him the arrangement and selection of poems in the volumes that followed *Gitanjali*. He was not at all like an Englishman. He looked and thought more like a Frenchman. His wife translated one of Father's books into French.<sup>1</sup> Their unassuming and charming manners made it easy to make friends with them.

The London season, as far as we were concerned, closed with a banquet given in the Trocadero Restaurant by a group of writers and artists led by Yeats. After Yeats had given a reading from *Gitanjali*—this time before a larger and more representative gathering—there were many after-dinner speeches, mainly felicitations by leaders of different literary groups. While replying to the toasts Father recited a few unpublished poems, and at the end when Father sang in Bengali the national song *Vande Mataram* everybody rose and remained standing.

### *In the U.S.A.*

The English winter was heralded by dismal foggy days, and in October we sailed for America, where a fresh and an entirely different set of experiences awaited Father.

I was able to induce Father to go to my university at Urbana, Illinois, and spend the winter months there. This, I had thought, would give me the opportunity to work for my doctorate. We got a house not far from my college and soon settled down. I was happy to see Father start writing immediately. I knew that as long as he remained busy at his desk he would not think of moving and I might get a long spell at the University to

<sup>1</sup> The Crescent Moon.

finish my thesis. It is not easy to set up house in America and my wife who had never been there before had a difficult time. But she had two persons to help her—Bankim Roy, a former teacher at Santiniketan, and Somendra Dev Barman, one of our students. The Seymours were of course a great help.

Father was writing *Sadhana*. As each chapter was written I had to get it typed. But since there were constant additions and alterations typing became an expensive item in our budget. So I bought a portable machine and did the typing myself. I had to type and retype each chapter so many times that by the time I finished I knew almost the whole book by heart. Very often the pastor of the local Unitarian Church, who as a graduate of Harvard claimed a broader cultural outlook than most people of this Middle West university town, asked Father to give readings from these manuscripts to select groups in the Church. Encouraged by the interest of the people who came to listen, Father read out all the chapters of *Sadhana* one by one and was satisfied that each of them could serve as subject matter for a separate discourse.

But the backwaters of a provincial place like Urbana could hardly be expected to hold him long. Father grew restless. I knew the symptoms too well. He had finished his writing and he felt the natural urge to communicate what he considered India's message to the West. Fortunately an opportunity presented itself to Father to address a larger public in the U.S.A. The Federation of Religious Liberals were holding a Congress at Rochester and Father was invited to give an address. His lecture on Race Conflict was greatly appreciated. Father met Dr. Rudolph Eucken, the sage philosopher who had come from Germany to attend the Congress, and had long and interesting discussions with him.

Invitations began to pour in now from different universities. I had to go to Chicago to make the arrangements for a series of lectures at that University. There I met for the first time Mrs. William Vaughan Moody, the wife of the poet, who eagerly offered her hospitality to Father during his stay at Chicago. This contact led to a much cherished friendship lasting until the death of this remarkable woman, whose house was the refuge of many would-be artists and writers and a great attraction to all persons of eminence visiting the U.S.A.

After Chicago the call came from Harvard and from New York for a series of lectures. I realised that the time had come to strike our little camp at Urbana and to give up my post-graduate studies. Not that I regretted it much.

By the middle of April, 1913 we were back in England from where we sailed for India on September 4, 1913.

### *Father's Foreign Tours*

Father was an inveterate traveller. Even in his early life he would not stay at home for long. He had then to satisfy himself with moving about within the limits of India, with only two brief visits to England. The first of these visits took place long before I was born and the second in 1890 when I was a child in arms. In most of his subsequent travels to the European continent and once to the United States, my wife and myself accompanied him. The years of his foreign travels with us, if I remember aright, are 1912, 1920, 1924, 1926 and 1930. In 1932 he flew to Persia and Mesopotamia with my wife only, as I was not well enough to accompany them. Besides these tours in which we participated he made several voyages to the Far East and to the two continents of America with other companions. Neither could we accompany him on his trip to Russia.

The visit to England in 1912 became memorable for the publication of *Gitanjali* followed by the award of the Nobel Prize. The next trip to Europe was taken immediately after the first World War in 1920. The two years 1920 and 1921 which we spent travelling in nearly every country on the continent of Europe and a long winter in the U.S.A. were a most revealing experience for us and gave us for the first time a true understanding of the outside world. The devastating effects of the war were fresh in the minds of the people and the very foundations of their civilization had received a rude shock. In desperation they were turning again to the East for some light to guide them in reconstructing their lives. Just then the presence of Father in their midst was looked upon as a godsend. His message gave them hope. In England and France people are not usually carried away by emotion. But even there the love and veneration Father received wherever he went was surprising. In cen-

tral and northern Europe, the people simply worshipped the ground he trod upon. In crowded meetings and railway stations we got used to the sight of people jostling each other to approach Father in order to touch the hem of his robe. The sale of his books was phenomenal. In Germany millions of copies were sold. The bank where the royalties had been accumulating wanted to know what should be done since the inflation was rapidly reducing the value of the deposit. By the time we reached Germany, the millions of marks to the credit of Father were worth only about ten thousand rupees. Our companion, a Bombay businessman, advised me not to cash in this paltry amount, but to buy Bavarian Bonds and wait for future appreciation of the mark. But within a few days the bank again wrote informing us that the value of the account was now worth only a few annas, and that the bank was obliged to close the account. Thus Father was saved the disaster of becoming a millionaire !

While we were spending a few weeks in the delightful house of Albert Kahn at Cap Martin in the South of France—a friend of ours, a French artist, had come back from a trip to Italy. While walking on the beach of a small fishing village in the Italian Riviera, she came upon a fisherman sitting in the shade of a boat drawn upon the sands, watching the nets drying in front of him and reading a book. Her curiosity aroused, she enquired what he was reading there in such surroundings. The man was quite indignant and replied derisively ‘Don’t think I am reading a trashy romance. Don’t you see it is Tagore’s *The Post Office* ?’

An officer of the Indian army told us that while he was travelling with his company on the continent, their train was halted at a wayside station and their carriage was loaded with gifts of flowers and fruit brought by a group of girls and as the train began to move these girls cried out ‘To the countrymen of Tagore !’ I have been told that Clemenceau sent for the Comtesse de Noailles to read out to him poems from *Gitanjali* on the evening the armistice was declared after the first World War.

But the most touching is a letter my father received from the mother of the young poet, Wilfred Owen, after his tragic death. I quote the letter :

Shrewsbury.  
August 1st 1920.

Dear Sir Rabindranath,

I have been trying to find courage to write to you ever since I heard that you were in London—but the desire to tell you something is finding its way into this letter today. The letter may never reach you, for I do not know how to address it, tho' I feel sure your *name* upon the envelope will be sufficient. It is nearly two years ago, that my dear eldest son went out to the War for the last time and the day he said Goodbye to me—we were looking together across the sun-glorified sea—looking towards France, with breaking hearts—when he, my poet son, said those wonderful words of yours—beginning at 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word'—and when his pocket book came back to me—I found these words written in his dear writing—with your name beneath. Would it be asking too much of you, to tell me what book I should find the whole poem in?

My precious boy was killed, one week before the awful fighting was over—the news came to us on Armistice day. A small book of my son's War Poems will be published very soon—his heart was torn with sorrow at the suffering he saw "out there" and the *callousness* of the majority at home—the futility of War—he speaks not of his own sufferings but any one who loved him can tell from his poems what he had passed through, to be *able* to write as he did. He was only 25. Wilfred loved all that was beautiful, his life was beautiful and of great influence for good. Our God knew but when he took him "hence"—and I must not murmur—for I *know* He is a God of love—and would have answered my constant prayers—if, to come back to me, would have been *best*. So I bow my head and go softly all my days till we meet again—as we shall do in the Land our Saviour went to "prepare" for us. Forgive this longer letter than I intended to write when I began—I should like you to read my son's little book, if you will do *us*, the honour?—(Chatto and Windus are bringing it out in the autumn)—if I may, I should be proud to send you a copy.

With great respect and admiration

from the Mother of Wilfred Owen—  
Susan H. Owen

It was impossible for us not to be moved by such demonstrations of love and admiration which we also witnessed not only at the height of father's fame in the years immediately following the war of 1914-18 but during all the subsequent tours that were undertaken by him.

*A Travel Diary*

I find that I kept rough notes of our visit to Europe in 1920. Although they were put down in great haste and are by no means complete I cannot resist the temptation of sharing the entries with my readers for whatever they are worth :

*May 15, 1920*

At about 10-30 A.M. after breakfast we quietly left for the dock. Kshiti Mohan Sen came with us in the car. By noon we were all on board—but it was nearly five in the afternoon before the boat sailed. The boat is a large one and very crowded.

*May 16*

Some distinguished company on board—The Maharaja of Alwar, the Aga Khan, Sir Currimbhoy, Sir J. Jeejeebhoy, the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar Ranjit Singhji (Ranji), and some others ; otherwise the greater portion of the passengers are uninteresting. Altogether too many people on board. Enough to make one feel uncomfortable.

Father seems to enjoy his talks with the Aga Khan and the Maharaja. Quite frequently the former reads out to him from Hafiz and then they have discussions on Sufism. The Jam Saheb too is very genial company.

*June 5*

From Marseilles to Plymouth it was an uneventful voyage. We were expecting Kedar Das Gupta to meet us at Plymouth but it was quite a surprise to see Pearson also waiting for us at the pier. Rothenstein and family received us at Paddington and took us over to the Kensington Palace Mansions, where he had arranged a flat for us. The place is quite comfortable.

Rothenstein came again after dinner. Father had a long chat with him mostly enquiring after old acquaintances and friends, and discussing modern conditions in India and England. It seemed so much like old times—the summer of 1913.

*June 6*

Pearson is putting up with us. The whole day long we had visitors. Rothenstein came with his daughters in the morning. Conversation turned on whether artists, writers and intellectuals

who were alive to the weaknesses of the government and resented its spirit of greed and exploitation should co-operate with it. Rothenstein evidently favoured co-operation; he thought the intellectuals could not very well refuse to do their best, when they were appealed to by the State to help in the reconstruction of the country; that the idea of 'service' was so deep-rooted in modern man, that his salvation lay through it, and that in the case of artists, specially, they could no longer depend for their living and the preservation of their art on the patronage of a few rich individuals; since more and more the rich would have less surplus to spend on the arts. The artists therefore must work for democracy through the State. Father pointed out that artists, of all persons, must have absolute independence, that it is not healthy for them to be under any restraint. He mentioned the Indian Society of Oriental Art of Calcutta—and said that the very fact of its being under Government patronage was sure to react and have a baneful effect on the mind and work of the artists. Rothenstein said that after all it was not so bad for artists to have limits imposed upon them. It does not really matter and sometimes it is better that their material should remain outside their control. Religion gave such opportunities to the Italian painters. Modern freedom has had harmful results, as in the case of the Futurists.

Spent a delightful afternoon with Sir Frank Dyson in the Observatory at Greenwich. He is such an unassuming person. The whole place has such a quiet atmosphere that it is wonderful to think that so much work is being carried on with so little pretension. Sir Frank Dyson has had very distinguished predecessors, Newton having been the founder of the institution. The whole place is full of the atmosphere of the continuity of a great work carried on through generations. Sir Frank showed us the photographic plate of the last total eclipse of the sun, which for the first time lent proof to Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

*June 17*

The last few days our engagements have been so many and I have had to go about so much that I did not have time to write this diary. Of course we are seeing a lot of the Rothensteins. Father goes there quite frequently, but not so often as he used to when he came last time and was living in Hampstead.



However, he has been able to meet many of his old friends and acquaintances at Rothenstein's house.

Father called on Mr. Montagu and Lord Sinha at the India Office. He told Mr. Montagu that it was not so much the punishment of Dyer that India asked for, but moral condemnation of the crime by the British nation. The Government of India was conducted by a machine; its heartlessness was what oppressed the people. One example of it was the permission given by the India Government to export cattle to Brazil, while thousands of children were dying for want of milk, although the chiefs of Kathiawar had prohibited export from their own territories. Mr. Montagu agreed with Father about the Punjab atrocities, but he said he was not quite free to act always in his own way. What he was trying to do was to bring about internal changes in the Government machinery so that such things should be impossible in the future.

After dinner Suniti Chatterji brought in Nicholas Roerich, the Russian painter, and his two sons. Roerich showed us an album containing reproductions of his paintings which had been printed on the occasion of the celebration of his jubilee by his friends. The pictures are indeed remarkable. There is nothing in Western art to compare with them. Father was greatly impressed. One of the sons is studying Sanskrit in London, and the other architecture. The whole family is going to India next September. Their genuine simplicity and unaffected manners were charming; so refreshing, so different from the stiffness of the English. We should like to know them better.

*June 27*

On Sunday afternoon Father lunched with Colonel Lawrence. He liked him very much. Col. Lawrence said he was ashamed to go back to Arabia because of the treacherous behaviour of the British Government. His promises to the Arab people had not been kept; he could not face them, the people whom he loved so much. Here is a young Oxford graduate who goes to Arabia and within a short time becomes their hero, is able to organise a powerful army which drives out the Ottoman power from the country; and he so freely mixes with the people that they recognise him as one of their own and all but crown him as their king. His career has been truly romantic, and for its

romance could hardly be matched in this century. When Father told him that he found there was a brutality inherent in the Western people which the Indian people did not have and could never really imbibe from their rulers—temperamentally they were so different—he replied that the only remedy lay in striking back at the Englishman harder than he hits, for then he would come to his senses and recognise others as worthy brothers.

June

On Thursday the East and West Society arranged a meeting at Caxton Hall to give Father an address of welcome. The hall was packed. Charles Roberts—the former Under-Secretary to Montagu—presided and made a rather long speech which people could hardly hear. Then Miss Tubbs sang four of father's poems set to music by a well-known composer. She has a powerful voice, but to our ears the music sounded inappropriate to the sense of the poems it tried to interpret. It was too operatic. Then Sybil Thorndike, who has recently made a mark by her tragic role in *Trojan Woman* and *Medea*, recited the poem composed for the occasion by Laurence Binyon. Such a beautiful voice! We were charmed by her elocution. Father replied with a brief speech—spoken effectively. It was greatly appreciated. Ernest Rhys told me on coming out that it was by far the best thing of the evening. Bhupendranath Basu in moving to thank the Chairman could not help referring to the political situation. It was an outburst. And because of its genuine feeling his words did not seem incongruous. The Maharajas of Alwar and Jhalwar, Ernest Rhys, Gilbert Murray, Laurence Binyon, Sir Krishna Govinda Gupta, and many others were present at the meeting. We met the Dubes—they now live in the country near Brighton, where they invited us. Quite a crowd were waiting at the entrance to see Father pass on his way to the carriage.

Charles Roberts had invited us to lunch. We met Lord Robert Cecil and Gilbert Murray. Father took Lord Cecil aside after lunch and talked all the time about Indian politics. Cecil admitted that he was entirely ignorant of Indian affairs, but would like to hear what Father had to say. After Father had told him about the situation and the hopelessness of the Reforms introduced by Montagu, Lord Cecil said, 'But you must remember we are a small community there, and since we believe that we

are ruling the Indians for their benefit—we must do everything in our power to see to the safety of this minority.’ Father replied, ‘It is only because you find yourselves a small isolated community and therefore unable to defend your position in India without the help of brutal force that this relationship has become so disastrous.’ He did not argue much, but went away as soon as Father had done with him. Gilbert Murray wanted to help in anyway he could ; and Father suggested if he could get a protest signed by a number of intellectuals like him, that would have a great moral effect. He promised he would try and said he did not anticipate much difficulty.

On Monday we all went to Cambridge. Lady Roberts had asked us to tea. Father went with Pearson by the 1-30 train ; we followed them by the evening train. Cambridge was crowded with outsiders—it was degree day. Prof. Anderson met us at the station. He has aged considerably. As it was difficult to get rooms we had to put up at the Blue Boar Hotel. Father was engaged with Prof. Anderson in the morning, discussing Bengali prosody and comparing it with French.

Lunched with Lowes Dickinson. Prof. Keynes came. He looks more like a youthful, bright, buoyant college student than a great authority on world economics. His fame does not seem to have affected him much. Dickinson has beautiful rooms in King’s College, decorated with pieces of oriental silk and Chinese paintings, which he must have picked up during his tour of the East. The conversation ran on the political situation, anecdotes of travel in the East and in America, the religious literature of India, Chinese painting and such like topics. He wished very much that the best of the philosophical literature of India could be made more easily available to the West in a form in which it could be understood by Western readers. Father said that most of the translations were unhappy, done by scholars without any distinctive grace of style or real comprehension of the originals.

*July 20*

On Saturday afternoon Father left with Pearson for Petersfield, to spend a week with the Muirhead Bones. Sturge Moore is also in the neighbourhood. We are staying behind, as there wouldn’t be room enough for all of us.

We called on Mr. and Mrs. Yeats this afternoon. We did not know the address but had heard from Rothenstein that they were living in Ezra Pound's flat. So we went to 10 Church Walk, but Ezra Pound had shifted from there. At last we traced them to a house quite near our place in Church Street. Rothenstein, who helped us to find the house, came in for a few moments. Yeats has not changed much. He and his wife have just come back from their long lecture tour in America. He said that of Father's recent works, *My Reminiscences* and *The Home and the World* had impressed him most. He wished father had carried on his autobiography to later years, when he wrote his best works and was getting into touch with society. He said *The Home and the World* was very true of Irish Society at the present time. All the problems apply equally well to his country. He asked if it had not stirred up strong feelings in India, for he was sure it would have done so in Ireland, if a similar book were written by an Irish writer.

On Friday evening Rothenstein had asked us to an after-dinner party at his house. Dilip Roy gave some Indian songs. Yeats who met Father during this visit, requested him to sing some *Gitanjali* songs. Yeats first recited the poem in English in his usual dignified manner ; then Father sang in Bengali.

July 22

An interesting interview with Sir Horace Plunkett in his flat in Mayfair. Pearson and myself accompanied Father. The conversation was mostly about the co-operative movement in Ireland. Sir Horace is not eloquent but every word he said came out of his thirty years' experience of organising village life in Ireland. He is an idealist but at the same time practical. He had been able to realise many of his dreams and that is saying a great deal. He said that they had made mistakes in the beginning but every one of those failures had taught them something and they could point out the defects that led to them. But the principle on which they had worked was sound ; they had never doubted that. If he were to start again from the beginning, he would know exactly how to proceed, what pitfalls to avoid. He was aware of the similarity of conditions in the West of Ireland and India. He was so sorry he could not go out to India with the Industrial Commission, owing to his health. Then he dis-

cussed some of the main principles of co-operation, saying that it was in the economic field that men could really unite and co-operate, more so than even in religion. When father mentioned our project of going to Denmark, he said that when they had started work in Ireland they had simply followed the methods employed in Denmark where, of course, the conditions were more favourable; and that for that very reason it would be more instructive for us to study the co-operative movement in Ireland than in Denmark. We should then have a greater understanding of the difficulties. He said that it was very necessary to study the local conditions, to find out the real needs of the people, and then to take up one thing at a time—one thing only, and make it a success. A failure at the beginning is very demoralising. Then he asked Father to come to Ireland—not just at present—but he thought October would be a good time. He expected the political situation to change by then.

On Thursday afternoon Father had lunch at Lady Courtney's where he met Gooch (Editor, *Contemporary Review*) and Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb. Father liked Gooch very much. Mrs. Webb's generalisations regarding the treatment of labour by Indian mill-owners and her hatred of the Fakirs as a class, brought out strong contradictions from Father.

*August 4*

The last week of July was entirely taken up by the performance by the Union of East and West of the five dramatic lyrics, newly translated but as yet unpublished, and Father's lecture under the same auspices, entitled 'Some Songs of the Village Mystics of Bengal'. Father had helped in the rehearsals of the plays and Pratima and myself in dressing up the actors. The plays were given at the Wigmore Hall without elaborate stage effects, with only a simple background of blue curtain and some pot plants and two spot lights. There were no foot-lights. It was on the whole very effective. The acting was also good. Between the acts Sarojini Naidu spoke for a few minutes introducing each play. Miss Alice Coomara (Mrs. Coomaraswamy) sang during the intervals and, though at times she was monotonous, her voice was much appreciated. Before the curtain rose Father recited *Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka*, both in Bengali and English. One of the things that produced the pro-

per atmosphere and gave a setting to the plays was a little piece of dumb acting, preceding *Kacha and Devayani*, in which the scene opened with some pupils sitting round their *guru* in a forest hermitage and a few hermitage girls going round watering plants with their pitchers. The *guru* chanted a Sanskrit hymn as the lesson for the day came to an end, and then as they were going away Kacha entered and met Devayani weaving a garland of flowers. This little prelude was suggested by Father, and Mukul Dey, Nikhil Chaudhuri and the Klinghoffer sisters took part in it. It is a pity that Das Gupta could not arrange for the production of these plays earlier in the season—all the best people have gone away now. Still the hall was filled, and I could feel that the audience was appreciative. Father's lecture followed next evening at the same place. There was a greater demand for tickets for the lecture than for the plays.

Some time ago Father had met Mlle. D'Aranyi at the Rothensteins. Rothenstein had asked Dilip Roy to sing Hindi music that evening. Father also gave one or two of his own songs. These greatly impressed Mlle. D'Aranyi and she asked Father to come to a party where she was going to play the violin. She said it had been her greatest ambition to play before him. Father went there and came back very happy—full of joy for the great treat she had given him. She played that evening as she had never played before and Father said this was the first occasion he had really enjoyed and fully understood European music. She is a wonderful artist—but she can only play well when inspired. And she was certainly inspired that evening. She is not only a great musician but a most wonderful creature, simple, frank, childlike and gives one the impression of possessing a deep spiritual nature. Both Rothenstein and Father are charmed with her. Rothenstein again invited her to play one evening at his house. All of us went. She said she was rather tired that day, and would play duets with her sister. They played beautifully—but, of course, as Father said, not anything like what she had done the previous evening. Her sister is married to a Greek—Mr. Fachiri, a very nice fellow. The sisters are Hungarians and are nieces of the composer Joachim. Next week we went to their house to tea. We at once became friendly with them. They are charming. No formalities; one could immediately feel the bond of human relationship with them. Prof Tovey was

there too. He played a few pieces from Bach and Haydn and explained them to us. He thought some of Father's songs suggested Haydn to him more than anyone else. Then they all played together (piano, two violins and cello) a most beautiful piece from Brahms. We all feel very fortunate in getting acquainted with these girls.

### *A Still-born Trip to Norway*

In 1920, when Europe had not quite settled down to normal conditions after the First Great War, political espionage was still being widely employed by all governments. It was at this time, while we were still in London, that Father was being flooded with invitations from every corner of Europe. In 1913 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize, he could not accept the invitation of the Nobel Committee to go in person to Sweden to receive the prize, as is the custom. Then the War interfered, and now that he was in Europe again and the invitation was renewed, he could not very well refuse it. So it was settled that the first country to be visited on the Continent would be Sweden, and the party to accompany him was to consist of Willie Pearson, who had volunteered to act as his private secretary, Mr. Bomanji, a Parsi gentleman from Bombay, my wife and myself. Meantime a new member came to be added to the party. Father who always enjoyed company felt quite happy about it. A lady was introduced to him by a well-known Orientalist whom we knew to be connected with politics but never suspected to be a tool in the hands of a government department. She made herself quite at home in our flat, in the manner natural only to continentals, and greatly pleased Father by her interest in Eastern philosophy. When she came to hear of our plans she immediately offered to act as a guide at her own expense, saying that she knew almost everybody worth knowing in the Scandinavian countries and that this little service would help to show an infinitesimal portion of the gratitude her countrymen felt for the great poet. Obviously she could not be refused. She began immediately to write letters and work out the details of the tour and proved so efficient and at the same time so amiable that both Pearson and myself felt considerably relieved. It had been settled that we were to cross the North Sea from Newhaven

and land at Bergen in Norway. On the very eve of our departure, as was always my custom when travelling with Father, I went to Thos. Cook's to buy our tickets for the boat. I was a familiar figure with the passage department and the clerk who had got used to our ways, when handing over the tickets, warned me with a smile, 'No refund this time !'

On returning to our flat in South Kensington that evening with passports, passages, luggage labels and what not, I was immediately treated to a romantic story by Bomanji, who had it fresh from his Swedish masseuse. It was the usual sordid kind of tale told about international spies, so familiar during the days of the War, and which in this instance applied to our future travelling companion. Pearson's moral indignation made him rush out to confront the lady with the truth. On Father it had a different reaction. He asked me immediately to change the programme and arrange to leave for Paris the next morning. I had long ago become used to such lightning changes, and after all did manage to get the refund of the tickets bought a few hours ago from the same clerk, without any other loss save that of what little reputation was still standing to my credit as a reliable customer in that office.

Next evening we were in Paris and a few days afterwards I received a pile of cuttings taken from newspapers in Bergen which I have carefully preserved. Big headlines and front page descriptions of our arrival at Bergen and even photographs of the party disembarking from the boat ! What a wonderful example of a modern newspaper stunt ! And the lady who had posted them to me, how she must have enjoyed her triumphs !

### *Paris Diary*

*Paris, 7th August 1920*

Saturday evening. Chatterjee of the Y.M.C.A. took us to the Grand Opera where *Faust* was being played. Father greatly enjoyed it. It was better than any of the operas we had seen in America or London. As a rule Father does not enjoy plays unless they are very good—so it was a relief to find he really liked the acting and the music. We had a bitter experience when taking him to *The Beggar's Opera* in London a few days ago. We had all heard praises of this play even from very discrimina-



ting persons— so when Sachin Sen wanted to take us to a theatre we ourselves suggested *The Beggar's Opera* and Father of his own accord wanted to go. But from the very first scene it proved to be a great disappointment. The subject, the treatment, the music, everything jarred on our taste. We could find neither humour nor any literary or artistic flavour about it. After the second scene Father felt awfully annoyed and bored and left the place with Pearson. We had to stay on so as not to offend Sachin— though, poor fellow, he had left the choice entirely to us. The last scene was the worst of all—it would have made Father furious. We failed to understand why this obsolete and vulgar example of the most decadent period of English literature should be suddenly revived and people go crazy over it. Only one explanation offers itself. After the war there has been a great urge for a strong nationalist revival. The English feel humiliated that they should always have to go to hear foreign operas, foreign theatres, foreign music etc. So they have produced this purely indigenous opera and to hide its shame they applaud it in their loudest voices.

*Paris, 8th August 1920*

Sunday morning, accompanied by Sudhir Rudra acting as our guide, we taxied to the guest house of the *Autour du Monde* at 9 Quai du Quatre Septembre, Boulogne sur Seine. The place is on the outskirts of Paris, beyond the Bois de Boulogne. The house and the surroundings seemed charming especially after the gloomy, noisy rooms of the hotel. Father remarked that after leaving India this was the first time he had felt really happy and at home. The Secretary, M. Garnier, was absent but it made no difference—the attendant Laurence was such a perfect gentleman and so attentive to all our wants. We admired him very much. This house seems to be given over for the use of the circle *Autour du Monde* by its owner M. Kahn, who lives next door. There are two bedrooms on the second floor where distinguished foreigners and recipients of the Kahn Travelling Fellowships are accommodated as guests. On the first floor is a good library with books of travel and information about all the different countries of the world and the Secretary's room. On the ground floor are the lounge, dining room, and a beautiful parlour opening out on to the garden behind. The garden is a most wonderful one. It belongs to M. Kahn, but on Sundays it

is open to members of the circle. We are allowed to go there at all times. Through a winding lane we enter at once into mountain scenery resembling the Pyrenees. The ground has been made undulating to give an appearance of hills and valleys. The hills are thickly covered with pines and firs and the ground strewn with big boulders. I have heard that all the trees and boulders on this section of the garden were actually brought from the Pyrenees mountains. On one side in a little opening of the forest is a small valley with a pond full of lilies. This is a delightful surprise—so hidden is it from the casual wanderer. Emerging from the forest we come to a level ground laid out with fruit trees and flower beds in the typically French style. The fruit trees are very interesting, trained to all kinds of shapes and sizes, but every branch is laden heavily with the most tempting fruits. In the middle is a beautiful glass house and farther on a little pond with rocks and grottos on its banks. Then another surprise awaits the visitor. He enters a Mongolian gateway and a most charming and picturesque view of Japanese landscape is revealed to him. There are some genuine Japanese tea houses, temples and pagodas scattered all over the garden. All the trees are diminutive, with their branches twisted and tortured into all kinds of fantastic shapes. There are some miniature trees in pots brought from Japan that must be hundreds of years old. Two Japanese gardeners were employed for four years in laying out this garden, and they did their job admirably well, for a garden like this would be greatly appreciated even in Japan. But more interesting than the Society, the house, and the garden is the owner and founder of all these—M. Kahn. He is enormously rich, a banker, well-known in international financial circles. But he lives an absolutely simple life—does not even touch meat or wine. Most of his money he spends in humanitarian work. He has founded scholarships all over the world—by which every year dozens of scholars are able to go round the world studying the social, economic and religious institutions of different countries and writing reports of their experiences. And then he has employed a number of men who go round different countries of the world taking motion pictures and coloured photographs of the life of these peoples, and also their natural surroundings and their monuments and architecture. He has an idea that when these have accumulated he will

be able to see the lines along which humanity is travelling and the goal towards which they lead. I could not exactly follow how this was going to be done. However the man is full of idealism. He sees visions and is patiently waiting for the collection of materials to draw conclusions from them. He is hopeful and full of enthusiasm for his country. He thinks France, of all countries, is best fitted to bring about a synthesis of conflicting ideas. Paris is full of temptations—life is so free and easy—but those who can rise above these are men of some mettle, because they have gone through temptations and have not fallen, but come out purer and better than ever before. M. Kahn speaks English, but he gets so excited while speaking that words do not come to him, and the more he is at a loss to find suitable words the more excited he becomes till at last he falls back on gesticulations. One afternoon he got very confidential, and told Father the greatest secret of his life, which he said, he had not confided to anybody else, except perhaps to Bergson. He said he came from a very orthodox Jewish family; his grandfather was a Rabbi, his very name signified the priestly class. When he came to Paris to seek his fortune he had brought with him all the tradition of his race and family. But just as he has earned his money single-handed, so he has built up his faith, too, by himself. He put everything, however dear to him, to the test of reason, and one by one most of them had to be rejected. But at last there came questions that his reason could not answer straightaway—he hesitated. One evening while staying at his villa in the South of France in Mentone—amongst the loveliest surroundings of nature—he was walking in his garden alone, when he knelt down and watched the stars and put himself the question of the ultimate reality. Then all of a sudden he saw a vision, he saw reality itself, what it was he cannot express—it was a wonderful experience with him. He cannot explain it—but he knows he has seen it.

We meet the Karpélès sisters nearly every day. The artist Andrée comes to paint Father and Suzanne, the younger sister, who is a pupil of Sylvain Levi and was given the title of Saraswati by the Calcutta University, comes to collaborate with Father in translating his latest poems. Father translates them into English, which she takes down in a note book and translates afterwards into her own language. Their home—a flat in

Auteil—is full of Indian curios, which they had brought with them from India. At their house we met M. Goloubew, Prof. Finot and Prof. and Mrs. James Woods of Harvard University. Goloubew and Finot are going in November to Indo-China to explore the archaeological remains in Cambodia. We told them we might be tempted to go there on our way back to India. M. Goloubew asked us to come to the Musée Guimet one afternoon—so we went last Saturday the 14th of August. He showed us some slides of Indian archaeology from his own collection and promised to give to the Asrama some slides and photographs which he asked me to come and choose next Tuesday.

M. Sylvain Levi has come to see Father twice within the week. He is a charming man—so unassuming, so genial. His students are devoted to him. He has asked Father to speak at the Sorbonne in October when he comes back. Father had long conversations with him. Father has been trying to impress on M. Levi, M. Kahn and others the necessity of the interchange of thought between France and India. In India we are getting Western culture only through English literature—we have not come in contact with Continental culture. Europe is suffering at the present moment because its culture has rejected the East altogether. By rejecting Christian ideals her civilization has lost its balance. She must also get in touch with Eastern idealism and faith, otherwise it would be fatal for her. Father has suggested an interchange of scholars.

Prof. Le Brun came to pay a visit on the second day after our arrival. He has read all Father's works and is a devoted admirer. He has himself translated *The Gardener* into French metrical verse. He is very eager to do some more translations. He brought his wife with him the other day—she is young. Their history is romantic and it seems Father's poems had a lot to do with it. They got attracted to each other through a common admiration for Father's poems. This is the second instance we have heard of such an adventure. Prof. Fouchet was married to his young pupil in the same way. Mme Fouchet had written a thesis on Father's works, and hearing that Prof. Fouchet was interested in India had taken it to him. This meeting inevitably led to the wedding altar!

Father is trying to find suitable translators for his works in France. Somehow or other not many of his books have been

translated into French yet. We were told *Nouvelle Revue Française* would be the proper firm to deal with, since they had already published *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*.

*With Father on the Continent*

We remained the guests of M. Kahn at the *Autour du Monde* for quite a long time. The hospitality of M. Kahn was widely known, and every day either at lunch or dinner we would meet writers, artists and other distinguished people. With Henri Bergson Father had very long discussions.<sup>1</sup> Father enjoyed talking with Bergson because he spoke English as fluently as his mother tongue; so few Frenchmen speak any English at all. Bergson's mother was Scottish; so it was no wonder that he could speak English—though with a Scottish accent.

The Comtesse de Brimont was quite a well-known poet in France. She used to come quite often to hear Father read the most recent translations of his Bengali poems. She would request him even to recite the originals. She had a desire to translate some of Father's works. She therefore wanted to enter into the spirit of the originals by hearing him recite them. But of much greater reputation was the Comtesse de Noailles. She came one afternoon escorted by M. Kahn, who was a devoted admirer of the poetess. We were charmed at once by her radiant personality. Effusive, demonstrative and highly temperamental, she was typically French. In her youth she must have been very attractive. Before she left she confessed to Father that she had come to conquer but all her vanity had vanished on meeting him, and now she was going away a devotee and a worshipper.

We had come to know the Karpélès sisters when they had visited India some years ago. Andrée, the elder sister, was an artist and had already established a reputation in Paris. Suzanne was a student of Sanskrit. Their devotion to Father was unbounded, and throughout our stay in France their services were entirely at our disposal. My wife became especially attached to

<sup>1</sup> A report of one of these was published at the time in the pages of the *Modern Review* by Sudhir Rudra who happened to be present. I was told afterwards that Bergson did not like the idea of a *tête-à-tête* being published without his permission.

Andrée. She remained our dearest and most faithful friend ever since—until her death in November 1956. Without her help we could not have come into such intimate contact with the artistic and intellectual life of Paris. Paris was still the cultural centre of Europe. We considered ourselves fortunate in having been able to get a glimpse of that intense living, that atmosphere of daring adventure always striving after the impossible in the realm of intellect and art—that rich and varied life which could only be found in Paris, until it was broken up by successive political and economic upheavals in recent years. About this time a revolution in the art world had been brought about by the Impressionists and later on by the Post-Impressionists. The art of Cézanne, Manet, Renoir, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Rodin and others of this school was the current topic of conversation, and a storm of controversy raged round them everywhere. Neither their paintings nor sculpture had yet found a place in any of the official exhibitions. We were anxious to see some of the paintings of this new school. Andrée Karpélès took us to an art dealer's shop in Place de Madeleine, where, I believe, for the first time a considerable collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings was exhibited. The effect on us was overwhelming. Van Gogh especially impressed me, and my admiration for this mad artist has not waned in the least during all these years.

Father had found a warm welcome in the home of Professor and Madame Sylvain Levi. They lived in a flat close to the Halle and the Jardin des Plantes, in surroundings not at all attractive. But once inside the living rooms of the Levis, the drab and uninviting surroundings were forgotten. There was such a homely atmosphere and the motherly attentions of Madame Levi seemed so pleasing that instantly everybody felt at ease. Prof. Levi was regarded as the doyen of Indological scholarship in the West. A great pundit, but possessed withal of a keen sense of humour and a sociable nature, his students simply adored him. His relationship with his students had much of the character of our traditional relationship between *guru* and *chela*. It was during these visits to their flat that Father proposed and it was settled that Prof. Levi would come to Santiniketan as the first Visiting Professor from abroad.

Father was very keen to meet two writers whom he consi-

dered the most eminent among the literary personalities of France. Although André Gide had translated *Gitanjali* some years back, Father had not yet met him. Romain Rolland's books had convinced Father that he had much in common with him. But he had not met Rolland either. Strangely enough, whenever Father mentioned his desire to meet Romain Rolland our French friends somehow or other avoided the subject. By his attitude towards the defeated Germans, Rolland had become a *persona non grata* in France and nobody cared to help us to find him, although we discovered that he was then living in Paris. With great difficulty I secured his address, and one day walked up many flights of dingy stairs to a flat on the top floor of an apartment house and knocked. I had never met Rolland nor even seen any photograph of the author. A frail-looking, oldish figure of a schoolmaster type opened the door and I was not much impressed by his appearance. The name was so much more romantic. His books and his name had conjured up in my imagination the picture of a very attractive personality. Now that I had met him at last I did not know what to say. I soon found out Rolland did not speak a word of English, and my smattering of French was of little use. So I hastily left without fulfilling my mission. We eventually came to know Rolland intimately but that was long afterwards when he had settled in Switzerland.

With André Gide I had an even worse encounter. Whilst taking a morning walk with my wife and Andrée Karpélès along the fringe of the Bois du Boulogne behind Auteuil, our friend pointed out a house with a curious modernistic architecture, saying that was where Gide lived. She also mentioned at the same time that he was very eccentric and never received any visitors. We, however, made up our minds to take our chance and knocked at his door. After waiting a few minutes we knocked again. Nothing however disturbed the silence of the house and we were on the point of going away, when suddenly the door was opened by a man in a flowing dressing gown. He stared at us for a moment, flung the doors wide open and disappeared in a trice. For a while we only saw a flying figure running up the stairs two at a time only to vanish in the mysterious and quaint interior of the house. Andrée explained it was nothing but shyness that made Gide behave like this.

Another very interesting person we met in Paris, not in 1920 but four years later, was Señora Vittoria Ocampo. She was well-known in her country, the Argentine, as a poet and writer and a patron of Art, and her reputation had spread to Paris, which she visited frequently. Her dignified bearing and charm of manners made her a very attractive personality. Whenever she came she would go straight to Father, in utter disregard of all formalities and completely oblivious of the presence of others. Her devotion to Father was extraordinary. She had the deepest regard and affection for him and she was willing to go to any length to satisfy his slightest fancy. Her imperiousness very often led to complications. When Father was invited to Peru to attend the centenary celebrations of her attainment of independence and was actually on his way there, it was Señora Ocampo who prevailed upon him to accept the hospitality of her country house near Buenos Aires, because she thought that he was too ill to undertake the arduous journey over the Andes to Peru. Later on it was found that her fears regarding Father's health were not groundless. This almost led to a major political crisis between Argentine and Peru. Father got used to a chair which she had provided for him in her house. When the boat which carried him back to Europe was about to sail, she insisted that Father's suite of cabins should be furnished by her. She had a great argument with the shipping company's agents and eventually managed to make them remove the door of the cabin in order to accommodate the chair she had brought. She knew how to get round people and make them carry out her wishes. The chair is still preserved in the Rabindra-Sadana (Tagore Museum) as a token of Vijaya's (so my father named her) devotion to Father.

In 1930 when Father visited Paris again he brought with him a selection of his paintings. The artists who saw them wanted him to exhibit them. We made enquiries and found that to get up an exhibition in Paris at short notice was next to impossible. It takes more than a year just to obtain a suitable hall. Father cabled to Señora Ocampo to come and help him. She came immediately, and, without the least effort—at least so it seemed to us—made all arrangements for the exhibition. The Theatre Pigalle was secured, the necessary publicity was arranged and the paintings displayed within a few days. This was an



amazing feat. Our French friends would not believe that an exhibition could be organized at such short notice in a place like Paris.

Immediately after the war it was not easy to obtain a visa to travel directly from France to Germany so we went over to Holland. There we met Dr. Frederick Van Eeden, the translator of Father's books into the Dutch language. Van Eeden was a disillusioned idealist and as a reaction to the inhumanity of the war he was trying to establish a colony where plain living and high thinking would be strictly followed. The difficulty arose when his disciples preferred easy living on the plea of high thinking. Van Eeden's colony met the same fate as all previous attempts by unpractical idealists at establishing Utopias in this selfish material world of ours.

The ovation Father received, especially in Germany, was tremendous. Most of all we liked the week spent in Darmstadt. We had been asked to stay with the Grand Duke of Hesse. He was still held in great respect not because of his position or his relationship with the Kaiser and Queen Victoria but because of his easy camaraderie with the common people and his genial personality. His popularity had not diminished in the least even after the revolution. The Duke related to us how on the day the revolution broke out a mob came to his gate and wanted to take possession of the palace. They were rather nonplussed when he opened the gates wide and invited everybody to come in and enjoy themselves. His barber was leading the crowd. They went straight to the cellars, had their fill of wine and then with his permission got out all his cars and drove madly round and round the city. In the evening all was quiet, and the Duke remained in possession of his palace.

During the week Father stayed in Darmstadt there was no official programme, no receptions to attend, no lectures to give. The grounds of the palace had been thrown open to the public. Whenever during the morning or the afternoon a sufficient crowd had gathered, Father would come out and meet the people and talk to them. Count Hermann Keyserling, who was really responsible for the invitation to Darmstadt and for the arrangements made there, would act as interpreter. He was of course well qualified for this task and performed it so well that Father had no difficulty in carrying on discourses in philosphi-

cal subjects for hours with the people. They would very often ask questions and he would explain to them what he thought about the problems. I wish a verbatim report had been kept of those discourses. It would have given a very good indication of the bent of the German mind and also a clear exposition of Father's ideas regarding various problems of life and philosophy.

In the palace of the Grand Duke had gathered quite a few members of the Kaiser's family. All the sons were there except the Crown Prince, who was at the time involved in an escapade of some sort. One day the second son asked me to take him to Father's room where he wished to meet him quietly. I have seen hard-hearted Germans cry before but the way in which the prince broke down and wept before Father was a revelation. At the end he presented Father with a specially designed vase which he said represented his sentiment more than he could express. For myself I received a cigarette case with the Hohenzollern emblem.

On Sunday the Duke and Count Keyserling took us out for a drive. At one of the parks we got down and mixed with the holiday crowd that had gathered there. There was a little hillock and Father was conducted to the top where he sat on a stone bench and soon all the people flocked there and stood round in a circle on the slopes. Without any encouragement they burst into song. Song after song followed for nearly an hour. There must have been a crowd of about two thousand. There was nobody to lead them and yet a choir of two thousand voices sang without hesitation and in perfect harmony. Such a performance would be unthinkable outside Germany. This spontaneous ovation from the common people, so beautifully rendered, touched Father deeply. We left Darmstadt with a heavy heart.

Having gone to Germany it was inevitable that Father should go to Sweden. The acceptance of the invitation by the Nobel Committee was overdue. Stockholm is one of the most beautiful cities of Europe hence the stay there was very pleasant. At the official banquet Father met most of the authors whom he had read in translations. The King of Sweden presided and Selma Lagerlöf acted as hostess on the occasion. Father sat between them. There were present besides others Knut Hamsun, Björnson, Sven Hedin, Bojer and all the notable writers of Scandinavia. I sat next to the Secretary of the Committee and he whis-

pered to me the story of his discomfiture when Knut Hamsun had been invited to receive the Prize. The banquet table is always provided liberally with wines and spirits. Knut Hamsun was of peasant stock and rather fond of the bottle. After the congratulatory speeches when they looked round to where Hamsun had sat, expecting a reply from him, there was only the empty chair. He had by then slid underneath the table and was vainly pulling at the skirt of Selma Lagerlöf to draw himself up. Fortunately Hamsun behaved himself on this occasion.

We had met Sven Hedin, the traveller, on a previous occasion. He had a habit of turning up unexpectedly in all sorts of places. He was at home everywhere—he had made the whole world his home. Father was an admirer of his travel books. Now he became devoted to the man. It was so easy to make friends with him. Sven Hedin was still smarting under the offensive treatment he had received from the British who had taken away all the honours once bestowed on him. He looked much younger than his age and told us that he would be again going out on an expedition somewhere in Central Asia. One day the Swedish Home Minister who came to see Father told him that his government would be only too pleased to offer him an army seaplane to go back to Berlin. Father liked the idea and a plane was being got ready. When Sven Hedin came afterwards to bid farewell, he was greatly upset on hearing of the proposal and warned me that I should not encourage Father to take such a risk. Although he loved his country, he could not allow Father to fly in a Swedish plane on any account. He would not mind if a German piloted the machine. This was when air travel was still in its infancy. He immediately rang up the Ministry and gave them a piece of his mind. After that we had no option but to board a train and be ferried across the Straits.

Coming back to Germany after Father had fulfilled a few lecture engagements in the north we found ourselves in the delightful town of München in Southern Germany. Father's German publisher Kurt Wolff had invited us to spend a few days with him at his home there. Whilst we roamed about the Art Galleries and Museums Father discussed business with the publisher. Most of the cities of Germany are beautifully kept, but the little capital of Bavaria deserves special mention. We became enamoured of its charm. Hitler was at that time trying

to enlist followers and organizing his Social Democratic Party, but people hardly took him seriously then. When I was taken to the Beer-hall which afterwards became so notorious, the table where Hitler always sat with his satellites was pointed out to me.

One day an Austrian lady came to call on Father. She said that she had come all the way from Vienna carrying invitations to Father to visit that city and deliver some lectures there. We had already decided to go back to Paris but she was insistent and would not take a refusal. Austria had suffered and was still suffering more than any other country after the war and was more in need of Father's healing presence, she said, than even Germany. When all other persuasions failed she even offered remuneration for the lectures and explained that although they were poverty-stricken the people of Vienna would gladly go starving for a week in order to save a few marks to enable them to get a glimpse of the great poet and listen to his words. Since it was impossible to deny her, Father had to agree. We did not go to Vienna at once but took in Prague on our way. This gave Father an opportunity to fulfil the promise he had previously made to the Czechs and also to meet Prof. Winternitz for whom he had very great regard. The Bohemians had suffered for centuries under foreign rule. As a result of the Treaty of Versailles and thanks to President Wilson the people were enjoying freedom for the first time. They were in a jubilant mood and Father's arrival just at that juncture aroused great joy and excitement. They tried to make the most of this occasion. Prof. Winternitz and Dr. V. Lesny were asked by the President, Dr. Masaryk, to take charge of the Poet and his party. Father had met Masaryk previously when we were staying at Cap Martin. In this way we came into close contact with the two learned orientalists, and the invitation Father extended to them then resulted in their visit to Santiniketan later on. Among the many invitations we received I was surprised one day to get two different invitation cards simultaneously from the University. The mystery was solved when we discovered that after gaining independence the Czechs had to have a University of their own--separate from the former State University founded by the Germans; but since buildings were scarce and could not be built in a day, the same building served both the universities

with their double set of professors and students by rotation. Thus we were in the morning received by Prof. Winternitz in the German University and in the afternoon by Dr. Lesny in the Czech University.

On our way back to the hotel, I wondered why we were being taken by a different route. I had by this time got fairly familiar with the city. Suddenly the car stopped and we were told by the chauffeur that there was some trouble and it would take a few minutes to put it right. Immediately a man turned up and said it was a shame that the Poet should wait in the car and offered to take us up to his place in front of which the car had stopped. We were hustled out and found ourselves in a photo atelier. Then I remembered that this very photographer had been pestering me for permission to take a photo and had been repeatedly refused. He must have then applied to the chauffeur for help. I must say however that he did not waste the opportunity he had obtained by perhaps not very honest means. In a few minutes he took some dozens of exposures. He had a relay of assistants who carried the exposed negatives and brought back fresh ones by passing them from hand to hand. And these photographs turned out to be some of the best Father had ever had taken.

In Prague we had felt so much at home, thanks to our professor friends, Winternitz and Lesny, that we felt sad to have to leave these hospitable people and their beautiful city crowded with ancient palaces and fortresses. But Vienna beckoned to us and Vienna had a charm of its own, although the war had left her population in a sad plight. From an atmosphere of joy and happiness at the sudden attainment of an un hoped for freedom we found ourselves within a few hours amongst a people living in semi-starvation and eating out their hearts in utter despondency. Such was the state of the continent of Europe after the first World War. Whilst crossing frontiers we had very often to witness extreme contrasts of this nature. I shall never forget an incident that occurred when we went over to Holland from France. At that time we were not sure that we would be permitted to go to Germany. But Father was most anxious to meet Professor and Mrs. Meyer Benfey who had translated his books So he had asked them to come over from Hamburg to a village in Holland where we were to be the guests of Mrs. Van

Eeghen. They arrived at night and we met them next morning at the breakfast table. The table was overloaded with heaps of fruit, bread, butter, cheese, cream and all kinds of rich fare. The two emaciated Germans sat there in silence and would not touch any of it. After a time tears began to trickle down their cheeks. They had not seen such profusion for the last five years. And Holland was next door to Germany.

Vienna was a gay city under the Hapsburg emperors. It was a doomed city after the war. The people went about with haggard emaciated faces dressed in tattered clothes. But it was wonderful to see that they had not lost their intense craving for art and such things as they considered really mattered. We found that theatres, concerts, opera houses and lecture halls were crowded as usual. People would starve themselves in order to save money to buy tickets for these places.

Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* was being given in the Opera House at this time. We persuaded Father to go and hear it. Prof. Winternitz who had accompanied us from Prague explained the story and during the performance interpreted the music. To an Indian, Western music is too foreign to understand. Never before had I even tried to understand classical operatic music. Although *Die Meistersinger* is perhaps the most difficult of Wagner's operas, we were able to follow and appreciate most of it, so well did the Professor interpret it to us. Of course by the time it was over our heads felt like bursting. What seems to me incomprehensible and in a way against all canons of art, is that Western music should not rest content only by arousing the emotions but should try to lead every emotion constantly to an impossible climax of passion.

True to her word the Austrian lady, who was responsible for bringing us to Vienna and arranging for the lectures given by Father, offered a handsome sum of money as honorarium. Father handed back the whole amount with the request that it be spent for providing nourishment to the starving children of Vienna. I was told afterwards that this gift endeared Father to the Austrians more than anything else.

*Visit to Italy*

The visit to Italy in 1926 on the invitation of Mussolini gave rise to much misunderstanding both in India and other countries. Prof. and Mrs. P. C. Mahalanobis had been selected by Father to accompany him. At the last moment Father insisted that my wife, our daughter Nandini and myself should also go with him. So we were quite a big party. Mussolini had appointed Prof. Carlo Formichi to act as guide and take charge of all arrangements in Italy. Formichi had spent a year at Santiniketan as a visiting professor and therefore we knew him quite well. He was a likeable person and made us feel quite at home immediately on landing at Naples and we thought we would be spared the burden of an officially conducted tour. One incident, however, gave us a warning. Leonard K. Elmhirst had come from England to meet us. Young Leonard had completely captured the heart of Father during his trip to the Argentine and he was overjoyed to find him now in Italy. Laughingly remarking that only an Englishman could serve as the proper corrective to Mussolini, Father asked him to join the party. A special train had been ordered to take us from the docks at Naples to Rome. Leonard hastened to fetch his belongings and buy a ticket. In the meantime we were hustled into the train by Formichi and without warning, it started. We looked out for our English friend. Just as the train was steaming out of the platform and gathering speed we saw him jump into it in spite of the gesticulations of Formichi warning him off. From this incident Leonard took the hint that his company would not be looked upon with favour by the authorities and left after a few days. I need not dwell at length on the splendid receptions given to Father everywhere he went. These are well-known from reports published at the time. But a few details which are not so well-known may prove to be of interest even now.

Whilst we were still in Rome and Father had given interviews to newspaper reporters and replied to public addresses, Mahalanobis and myself began to suspect that Father was not being correctly reported in the papers. Our friend Andrée Karpélès, who had now a Swedish husband and had come to Rome partly to meet us and partly to make her husband acquainted with Italy, confirmed our suspicions as she could read Italian. We

tried to pick up some knowledge of Italian ourselves but not daring to rely on this, employed an Austrian lady who knew both English and Italian to translate the reports. The translations were not satisfactory. We discovered that she was a well-known international spy and was in the pay of Mussolini.

By a strange coincidence we found that Rome had become the rendezvous of a large number of our old friends and acquaintances just when we were there. The presence of Mrs. Vaughan Moody in addition to that of Leonard Elmhirst, Andrée Karpélès and her husband Dal Hogman was a pleasant surprise. These friends brought also their friends to the Grand Hotel where we had put up. Father was in a very happy mood; he enjoyed good company and there was no lack of it during the days we spent in Rome that summer. Mrs. Moody suggested one day that Father should not leave the city without meeting the philosopher Benedetto Croce. Father, of course, had been wanting to meet him but did not know exactly how to bring it about not having any previous acquaintance with him nor knowing where he lived. Prof. Formichi was not too anxious to help. Mrs. Moody brought a young officer of the Italian army who knew Croce well and who offered to bring him to Father without anybody getting wise about it. Being an officer in the army who owed his allegiance to the King, he rather relished the idea of doing Mussolini in the eye, just for once. Father told him not to be in a hurry. He would ask the Duce himself to arrange the interview. Father did ask him when they met. Mussolini immediately ordered Formichi to arrange the meeting. Now that permission had been obtained the problem arose how to arrange that Croce should be able to talk freely with Father without the presence of Mussolini's agents. The young officer again offered his help. He flew to Naples and brought Croce the next morning at five o'clock, before anybody was up. Father had an uninterrupted talk for many hours with the grand old man of Italy, and was sitting at breakfast with him in his room, when Prof. Formichi turned up. I was in the corridor mounting guard and when he learnt from me that Father was closeted with a visitor who was none other than Croce, he got very excited. It was amusing to witness the tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth that followed.



With regard to the interview, I do not know what<sup>1</sup> the two great men discussed for so long—none of us were present—but that Father was pleased is evident from a letter he wrote to Duke Scotti immediately afterwards :

With some difficulty I secured a glimpse of your great philosopher Croce. For my delight is in meeting the heroes of the free mind. When we come to Europe it is to have the inspiration of the liberty of thought and of creative spirit and not to be bewildered by the spirit of the athletic vigour of your efficiency which you seem to have newly borrowed from America, the continent which seems to believe that growing fat is to be growing great and is therefore suspicious of idealism and free expression of truth.

On our first visit to Italy in 1925 Duke Scotti had received us in Milan. Belonging to one of the most ancient and noble families of Italy, he was a true aristocrat and in addition a good scholar responsible for founding the Circolo Filologico Milanese in Milan. Everybody loved and respected him. But Mussolini did not like the influence he had over the people in Milan. Although the Fascist revolution had started in that city and it was from there that Mussolini marched towards the south, the northerners never became ardent followers of the Duce. We soon came to know that he had sent his trusted mistress to the Hotel Cavour where we were staying to keep a watch on Father and the nature of his intimacy with Duke Scotti. On this visit the Duke as well as people that we met talked freely with regard to the political situation in Italy. But when we returned in 1926 the circumstances had changed. The Fascists had gained a stronger hold over the north, and people were quaking with fear and keeping their feelings to themselves. When we met the Duke, he was a changed man. He dared not do more than pay a formal call. We could see that it was painful for him to keep himself under such control. In order that Father should not take away a wrong impression he sent his near relative, the sister of the King, to meet Father secretly in Turin, not only to explain his conduct and tell Father about the sufferings of their family under the Fascist regime but to hand over some papers containing evidence of the barbarous treatment meted

<sup>1</sup> The interview was briefly reported by P. C. Mahalanobis in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* for October, 1926.

out to intellectuals who were unwilling to prostitute their souls at the altar of Fascism. We had not been feeling very happy over the false publicity given to Father's visit by the Fascist Press. We had heard whispers of the atrocities committed by the hirelings of Mussolini. These documents sent by the Duke confirmed our surmise that all was not well behind the apparent prosperity and happiness of the people. Father could do nothing so long as he was in Italy to remove the impression that he had become enamoured of Mussolini's rule. He therefore became anxious to get to Switzerland where he could obtain an open forum and speak out his mind. Romain Rolland had settled down at Villeneuve, a very quiet resort on Lake Geneva. We decided to go there. But there still remained Venice and Turin to complete our tour programme in Italy. The people of these two cities were insisting that Father should go there. Venice had its own attraction and Turin was on our way to Switzerland. So the invitations that continued to pour in through letters and telegrams and even deputations, were finally accepted, and we went first to Venice.

The reception given to Father on arrival by the city fathers and other dignitaries was interesting and impressed us by its medieval character. Venice still kept up its old customs and traditions. We could well imagine similar receptions being accorded to some royalty visiting the ancient city of the Doges in the Middle Ages. But a rude shock was received when we were taken to our hotel accompanied by all these officials dressed in richly decorated costumes on a fleet of very modern motor boats noisily hooting their sirens to proclaim their modernity. Whilst Father was busy receiving deputations and attending official functions we younger people used sometimes to enjoy ourselves on the quiet by going out in gondolas and wandering aimlessly through the maze of canals, traversing the city, watching the life of the people and occasionally coming across interesting relics of the past. We avoided the Grand Canal, since much of its character had been spoilt by the tourist traffic. On hearing my wife talk about our interesting experience and of the comfort of being able to move about freely without being escorted by officials Father bemoaned his fate and said we were a heartless and selfish lot of youngsters. Spurred by his admonition we very quietly engaged a gondola

early next morning and slipped out with Father on a tour of the canals before anybody could know. When we returned to the Grand Hotel after having thoroughly enjoyed our trip (Father rarely had any privacy when travelling abroad and as a matter of fact not much even in India) the hotel was in an uproar. The manager had collected the whole staff and was making enquiries as to how and where the Poet had disappeared. The telephone was kept busy and the police were being asked to send out patrol boats to make a search of the canals. But what amused us most was the sight of Professor Formichi in utter desperation, running about the hotel shouting and gesticulating as only an Italian can. Even a temptingly hot omelette on the breakfast table afterwards could not mollify him.

### *Frontiers in Europe*

The tour of 1926 was a memorable one for various reasons. For those who had not been with Father on this tour, it is impossible to imagine the immense popularity and the ovation with which he was received in every country. At every place he visited he received not only a princely reception by the government officials as well as the populace but was treated with the profound respect due to a prophet. At every railway station huge crowds would gather to have *darsan* or just touch the hem of his robe—a sight which hardly fitted in with our conception of the rationalistic and unemotional people of the West. From one end of Europe to the other we were carried along on the crest of this emotional tide. Towards the end of the tour we found ourselves in a more oriental setting in the Southern Balkans. After a short stay at Sofia, crowded with engagements and public receptions, we left this pretty capital of the Bulgars on the special train ordered by the king, and escorted by a host of officials, journalists and writers for a little town on the Rumanian frontier. It was a very short journey but the preparations for it were elaborate in the extreme. We had by this time become quite accustomed and almost indifferent to hearty welcomes, but such a demonstrative farewell seemed rather unusual. However, the royal suite of carriages soon reached its destination and we found ourselves on a wharf overhanging the banks of the Danube, which is the natural eastern boundary between

the two countries. The river at these lower reaches is fairly wide and did indeed remind us of the Ganges. But imagine our surprise when we had to embark a battleship cruiser, gaily decorated with flags and buntings, to be ferried across the river to the Romanian port-town on the opposite bank. This we did to the accompaniment of gun salutes and a brass band playing their loudest the national songs of the country. While all this noise was going on we noticed a certain amount of curiosity and eagerness on the part of our hosts scanning the scene of the opposite bank which we were approaching. This feeling very soon changed to one of amusement and then suddenly to hilarious mirth as the cruiser was banked on the side of a desolate pier with only one solitary person, who stood gesticulating and tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth at the approaching boat. A final salvo of guns and we were courteously escorted down the gangway into the arms of this wild-looking gentleman. As the boat moved out we could hear another loud burst of laughter and then the brass band followed making incoherent noises. No explanation was offered to us at the time for the reason of these outbursts of vociferous mirth. The explanation came later from the disconsolate gentleman who received us and who happened to be the station master of the tiny railway terminus. The Bulgars had seen to it that no definite information of the time of our arrival reached the Romanian government, so that there would be no previous arrangements welcoming Father and conveying our party to the Romanian capital. The discomfiture of the Romanians on this occasion must have given the Bulgars many an hour of enjoyment afterwards.

### *A Swiss Peasant*

A summer holiday in the surroundings of St. Moritz, Switzerland, is a delightful experience. We were particularly fortunate in having the company of some Hungarian friends, which made the holidays still more enjoyable. We had chosen a comfortable but secluded hotel beside the lake at Sils Maria, just far enough from the sports-mad crowds that generally infest the famous summer resort. Our group of friends included the famous Hungarian violinist, Huberman. But we saw very little of him as he used to shut himself up in his suite and could rarely be persua-

ded to come down to the dining-room. We came to know of some of his idiosyncrasies. Whenever he had to travel, not one but several contiguous suites and sometimes the whole floor had to be booked for him. Moreover, he always carried padded quilts which had to be fixed on to the doors and windows. Even after these precautions had been taken to make his room perfectly soundproof, he would complain of the noise.

One afternoon an excursion had been arranged to the Italian frontier. We sped on motor cars down winding roads through deep gorges and pine-covered valleys to this tiny hamlet bordering on Italy. We stopped opposite a house where grew some palm trees and as I stood admiring these in such strange and foreign surroundings, a Hungarian friend suggested that we should call and find out more about the proprietor who had such taste. A very uncouth looking man came out and beckoned us to go inside. But we had to discover one amongst our party who knew the particular dialect spoken amongst the peasants in this part of Switzerland before we could understand a word of what he said. One by one the whole party was introduced to him. When the names of my wife and myself were mentioned the man opened his mouth in astonishment and enquired if we had any connection with the Poet. When the relationship was explained to him his astonishment knew no bounds and he began to shake with excitement. He ran inside, shouted for his sister and then catching hold of our hands dragged us upstairs to a room which to our great surprise we found filled from floor to ceiling with books. All the German translations of my father's works were there. But all this was nothing when to our intense astonishment the man, dressed in the usual costume of the Swiss peasantry, with his rough hands pulled out a Sanskrit classic and began to recite poem after poem in the original. Through our interpreter I learnt that some years ago he had come across a translation of two lines from the *Upanishads* in a German book. These appealed to him so much that then and there he made up his mind to send for some Sanskrit books in order to learn the language and to read the original of those translations. His knowledge of Sanskrit which he had to pick up by himself without any help from anyone in that lonely spot in the mountains of Switzerland, forty miles away from any railway, seemed to me to cover a wide range of studies in literature and philoso-

phy. We then met the sister who said that she was passionately fond of *Chitra*, *The Home and The World* and *The Post Office*. Every evening she went out to give readings from these books to the other peasants of the village. For her livelihood she made leather cushions with Indian designs. The models of the designs were taken from an old *bat-tala* edition of the *Ramayana*; how she secured it is a mystery.

We returned home much richer by our contact with the peasant savant and the spontaneous homage of the two simple unsophisticated souls to cultural India made us feel inordinately proud of our heritage.



### *Potisar*

In between the years spent in travels abroad with Father, my time was mostly spent at Santiniketan. The management of the estates, however, remained in my charge and I had necessarily to pay occasional visits to Shelidah and to Potisar. I greatly enjoyed these visits, as they helped to renew the memories of my boyhood days, spent in pleasant adventures amidst these surroundings. Some years after the first World War, urgent business took me to Potisar for a few days.

A long and tedious journey in a jolting train came to an end and with a joyful eagerness, as when one is about to meet a long-lost friend, I boarded the house-boat which was to carry me to Potisar. The boat moved without making any fuss and with hardly any apparent hurry, but soon the railway bridge over the river, the ugly sheet-iron sheds that cluster round every wayside station in Bengal, were left far behind and out of sight.

The river Atrai is not one of the many rivers that have a wide reputation in our country. It is hardly known to outsiders. Its history does not go back to ancient times. It is not mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Pilgrims do not crowd its banks on holy days, to dip in its waters and purify their souls. This river is one of the multitude of similar obscure streams meandering aimlessly for hundreds of miles through the verdant plains of Bengal. It seems to be conscious of its insignificance, and tries to find its way out willy-nilly through wide stretches of paddy land, often spreading out and losing itself in formless swamps. It would then suddenly make up its mind boldly to enter a village and, when half through, would gently turn round a courtyard with apologies to its owner and disappear again into the wilderness. And never during its endless sinuous course would

it have the courage to approach a big market or a prosperous town.

As I was carried along the sluggish current of this Atrai river, I soon fell in with its mood. Time lost its measured value. The necessity of arriving at a destination vanished. I drew the easy-chair close to the window and gazed silently at the slowly receding landscape. On both sides of the bank were laid ingenious fishing traps of various shapes and sizes. A procession of girls, with their rustic saris drawn over their heads and holding shining brass pitchers clasped to their lithe bodies, wound their way to the bank where the path from the village dipped into the river, and where with clamorous shouts naked children splashed about in the water. A flock of tame ducks gliding on the water drew away towards the opposite bank. At the next turning of the river the inner courtyard of a cluster of thatched cottages lay exposed to view by the bank with a bamboo fencing to which still hung a cucumber climber. On one side was a stack of paddy brought fresh from the fields and on the other stood a couple of old women with long poles husking the paddy in a wooden bowl. Watching from the river as it wound through the peaceful hamlets, the panorama of the daily life of these simple folk was revealed to me; the drudgery of the men in the fields, the monotonous routine of daily housekeeping of the women, their occasional recreations and rare amusements. I sat gazing and watching with interest every little detail, until suddenly the feeling that I had no right to such an intimate view of a life that was not my own, made me turn indoors, ashamed of my curiosity.

But this picture of the serene life of the peasantry in a corner of Bengal, would be present even when I sat alone inside the cabin. My thoughts would go back to the primitive age, and still the same picture would appear. I review the long history of India with its rise and fall of civilisations, with its devastating invasions and internecine wars, and yet I can see no change in the picture of the villages that I have just seen. I begin to wonder what it is that has carried this life unbroken and unaffected through the centuries of a chequered political history characterized by kaleidoscopic changes. Is there a hidden strength, a principle of social cohesion stronger than that which knits the chemical atoms together, an elemental force of which



we are still unaware, that has kept the life on the land unchanged through the ages ? Or is it just its amorphous character, lack of all organisation, its entirely negative aspect that has given it an enormous pliability to adjust itself to all conditions ?

In such a confused state of mind I disembark at a village and meet a group of elderly people. I am eager to question them, to find an answer to the problem which is worrying me. Sitting on a primitive cane chair in the low-roofed verandah of a cottage, with my hosts squatting on a mat in front of me, most of them wearing only a loin-cloth and passing the hookah made of coconut-shell to one another, I imagine myself transported to the Middle Ages, holding a Panchayat over some knotty social problem concerning the village.

An old man with flowing white beard gets up and says : 'Babuji, what is the use of all this talk ? I don't think our young men will do anything much with all the rubbishy reforms they glibly expound to us. Give us a Lenin and everything will be changed.'

The spell was broken. I got up and hurried back to my boat.



### *Father As I Knew Him*

It would appear presumptuous on my part to attempt an assessment of my father's genius about which so much has already been written and I dare say more will be written. Father himself has given us his reminiscences and unburdened himself to many friends in his numerous letters. It will be noticed, however, that his reminiscences are not so much a chronicle of events as the story of an inner unfoldment. It is not easy to understand a man of genius. The bare facts of life are a poor commentary on the almost imperceptible working of a most sensitive mind. An ordinary mind functions within the narrow limits of work-a-day existence. A genius, on the other hand, transcends the limits of mundane facts. He lives in a world which is not always governed by physical laws. This is perhaps true of all creative artists, and it is particularly true of my father. He had so many facets to his genius; he combined in himself the minds of a poet, a scientist, a philosopher and a seer. In spite of all attempts to understand a genius of this type, the personality of the man remains elusive, and beyond the yardstick of any measurement.

Intensely human as he was, Father's was yet a most complex character. By nature extremely shy and sensitive, there was no knowing how he would react to men and things. He was extremely capricious in his moods. At times he would throw off all reserve and entertain friends—mostly young admirers—with brilliant sallies of wit and humour; at others he would withdraw completely within himself, making it impossible for others to fathom his thoughts. In his happiest moods, he could mix with children as though he were one of them. I have never known

a more loving nature, and yet in all my experience I have never come across another man who inspired such a sense of awe and reverence.

His ever-changing moods were a constant strain on his closest associates. It has occurred to me that very often Father did not want to admit even to himself his innermost feelings and convictions. It was therefore difficult even for those who were nearest to him, to know the reasons which made him act in a particular way. The delicacy of his own feelings, especially with regard to personal matters, and his extreme solicitude for the feelings of others, often led him to adopt devious means of hiding his real intentions. On many occasions my wife and I have felt amused when he tried these on us.

My grandfather loved his youngest son and was delighted to discover unusual talent in him while still a boy. Probably for this reason he was very generous to him. Father was given the most convenient and comfortable rooms in the family house, and when even this did not satisfy him, grandfather helped him to build a separate house for himself. This house came to be known as the *Lal Bari*, because of its red colour. Father always liked to change his surroundings. He easily got tired of living in the same room or the same house for long. Santiniketan can boast of more than a score of houses enriched by their association with Father. He, therefore, felt very happy to receive this assistance from Maharshi, and started to build the house. My cousin Nitindra, who had some previous experience in the construction of houses, undertook the work. Father suggested that the house should consist of two large upper and lower halls only, so that he would be free to alter the interior arrangements whenever he chose by means of movable partitions. The house was built according to this plan, and then when we wanted to move into it, we discovered that although there were the two big halls as desired by father—one on each floor, there was no staircase to connect them !

Although my grandfather had handed over the management of the estates to father, he himself controlled the expenditure. He was a strict disciplinarian. On the second of every month the accounts had to be brought and read out to him. He would remember every figure, and ask awkward questions whilst the report was being read. Father used to be afraid of this day of

trial, like a school-boy going up for his examination. We children would wonder why *our* father was so afraid of *his* father.

Maharshi was once pleasantly surprised to hear that my father had written, not the usual kind of poems young men write, but a book of devotional songs. He sent for him one day and asked him to read out all the poems to him. For hours Maharshi listened with rapt attention while Father recited the poems, and then when he began to sing, tears silently rolled down his cheeks. As soon as Father had finished, Maharshi gave him the wherewithal to publish the poems. It is said that he told Father, 'I wish I were a king to reward you adequately. But being what I am, I can only give you so much.' The book was published as *Naivedya*. The translations of many of the poems contained in *Naivedya* have been included in the English *Gitanjali*.

Father never treated any of his children harshly, nor did he, on the other hand, lavish sentimental affection upon them. I do not remember any occasion when Father subjected any of us to physical punishment. Temperamentally it was impossible for him to use violence. During all the years of my boyhood and youth, only thrice have I seen him get really angry with me. As a child I did not like bathing with its inevitable rubbing and scrubbing as though the body was something meant to be maltreated regularly every day. One day my mother, having altogether failed to make me submit to this ordeal, appealed to Father. He took hold of me, placed me on the top of an almirah, and left me there without any scolding—not even a single harsh word. Mother had no more trouble with me at bath-time.

The next occasion was at Shelidah. It was the last day of the Durga Puja. I had been told that they had a regatta on this day on the opposite bank of the Padma at Pabna. Hundreds of river-craft gathered at the mouth of that very charming little river Ichamati, brightly lit with thousands of oil lamps. But what tempted me most was the boat-race that followed. A kind of fishing-boat—very narrow and long, with most graceful lines—would be stripped bare and manned by a score or more of oarsmen or scullers, and these would compete in the race. Having lived on the banks of the mighty Padma and being the proud professor of a dinghy purchased by saving every pie of the monthly allowance of Rs. 5/- given by mother for pocket expenses, I considered myself an 'old salt' already, and, as such,

how could I miss this opportunity ? I cajoled the manager into rigging out the larger of the two pinnaces we had on the river and getting ready for the voyage. A voyage it would have to be and a daring one too, because at this time of the year with the river swollen by the rains—a swirling sea of water seven miles wide—it was no easy matter to go across. Neither did we anticipate what an adventure lay before us. Permission was easily obtained from Father : he never refused me such requests however foolhardly the enterprise might be. Only he saw to it that we were properly equipped. We started early in the morning, and at the first stroke of the oars the boatmen as usual invoked the blessings of the water-god.

So swift was the current that it took us the whole day to cross over to Pabna. We could already see the illuminations from a distance when the manager and my uncle began to fidget and suggested that we should turn back, as my father would expect us to return before dinner-time. But their admonitions fell upon deaf ears, and I went back to my post at the rudder. When we reached the place, they were all ready for the race. A hundred or more boats strung out in a long double row made the start, with a send-off chorus of hearty shouting. The Oxford-Cambridge boat race is a tame affair compared to this. I shall never forget the sight of these finely-built boats silhouetted against the soft glow of the sunset, shaped like the thin blade of a rapier and moving out at an incredible speed. I was very fortunate in being able to witness this relic of old Bengal. Such a regatta never again took place at Pabna. This interesting sport has disappeared altogether from Bengal.

Clouds gathered while we were intent on the festival which ended with the immersion of numerous decorated images of the goddess. The boat turned towards the Shelidah bank in inky darkness, and very soon we lost our bearings. The armed escorts, who had accompanied us according to the custom of those days, fired volleys at intervals, and then listened in the hope of attracting return volleys from the *ghat* at Shelidah, which would help us to get back our sense of direction. This signalling proved successful. At about two o'clock in the morning we first heard some firing and directed the boat towards the sound. When at last we landed, I saw Father standing there at the *ghat* waiting for us, and one glance at the stern look on his face, faintly lit

by the light of a hurricane-lantern, was enough to make us quake with fear. He hurried away without meeting me and did not so much as utter a word of reproach or anger during the days that followed. His silence on such occasions was more terrifying than a thrashing—as many others besides myself will testify.

Some years later at Santiniketan, I was responsible for getting together a group of young teachers to go for a picnic to Surul. This was long before the Rural Reconstruction Institute came to be established at Sriniketan. We camped in the dilapidated Barakuthi, which had been built in the days of the East India Company. It was formerly the residence of the indigo planter, John Cheap. We made merry till the early hours of morning. When we returned to Santiniketan, none of the teachers were prepared to take their classes that forenoon, and yet no one dared approach Father for leave. Since it was at my instance that the discipline of the Asrama had been broken, I went up to him with a contrite heart and as brave a face as I could muster. Father only asked, 'Did you enjoy yourselves?' All the explanations I had thought of so carefully, were blotted out instantly on hearing the tone of his voice. A hasty retreat and no explanations. Never again did I try to do anything consciously that would displease Father.

Recognition of his genius as a poet and a writer came to Father after he had reached a mature age—but he was much sought after and became a popular social figure while he was still quite young. His extremely handsome appearance coupled with a remarkable voice, probably partly accounted for his popularity. But he had to pay dearly for it. Once he was delivering a lecture at a public meeting presided over by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the novelist. The hall was crowded and the lecture was long, and Father had to strain his voice. After he had finished, the audience started clamouring for a song. Father felt he could not do it after having lectured for an hour and a half. But when Bankim Babu also joined in the request, he could not very well refuse. He sang as only he could sing, filling the hall with his powerful but melodious voice. But he had overstrained himself, and his vocal chord became damaged. He had to go to Simla for a change and rest, but his voice was never the same again.

Father liked to dress well. In his youth he always wore the *dhoti* with a silk *kurta* and silk *chaddar* in public. He looked very handsome in his flowing Bengali dress, and people would admire the colour of the *kurta* or the way he wore the *chaddar*, and try to imitate him. At other times, especially when traveling, he liked to wear trousers with a buttoned-up long coat or *achkan* and a small *pugree*. This pleated turban, the invention of my uncle Jyotirindra, came to be known as the *Pirali Pugree*. Afterwards, at a much later age, he discarded the short *achkan* and took to the long flowing *djibbah*, or often a pair of them, worn with a soft cap. He was not afraid of colours and his favourite colour was fawn with a tinge of orange. Most people who have seen him at his advanced age, will associate him with this sober but pleasant colour.

I would like to refer to one interesting thing in this connection. Father and Gandhiji were great friends. Yet, outwardly no two people could be more unlike each other. Gandhiji in his loin-cloth and Father in his colourful flowing robes, presented a strange contrast. This could not have failed to attract public notice, and I have heard people make uncharitable remarks about Father's extravagant tastes. It may, however, be noted that Father's clothes were not necessarily made of expensive material. He had the peculiar knack of making the simplest thing look beautiful, and the most expensive thing look simple. Gandhiji's loin-cloth was symbolic of the naked millions. It certainly had its significance. But Father's artistic garb was not without its significance also. Gandhiji's way of life, whether he willed it or not, encouraged a kind of austerity in our national life. Austerity as such had little or no appeal for Father. In a land of poverty where life was nothing but a story of systematic deprivation, austerity was not the ideal to be held up before the people. On the contrary, our people needed to be encouraged to taste the good things of life. Unfortunately, however, by a curious confusion of ideas, shabbiness in dress and slovenliness in habits were coming to be regarded as social virtues. This naturally shocked Father's artistic sensibilities.

I think few writers have had to face such severe and unfair criticism as Father, during the greater part of his life. Hardly any of these were literary criticisms—they were acrimonious and sometimes even scurrilous. One obvious reason for the per-

sistence of such vituperations appearing regularly in a section of the Bengali press, was that the editors had early discovered that slandering Father paid handsomely. There was, however, a more subtle reason behind this. A considerable part of the public never felt that Rabindranath really belonged to them. He was born in an aristocratic family, he wrote in a style and language which was too individual and had nothing in common with his predecessors or contemporary writers; moreover he belonged to the Brahma Samaj, a non-conformist movement to reform Hindu orthodoxy and hence regarded as a menace to society. It is perhaps for these reasons that, besides the hack writers, even literary coteries presided over by such well-known men as Dwijendralal Roy and Chittaranjan Das sought to undermine the influence of Father over the youth of the country. I cannot say that Father was indifferent to the campaign carried on against him. It deeply pained him to find that people whom he liked and whom he had befriended in their early careers, turned out to be his bitterest critics. But never did he reply to the attacks made on him, except once in a poem addressed to the detractor, *Ninduker prati*, and that too was in a lofty strain with not one word of reproach.

All his life he had felt lonely, an intellectual loneliness which is the common experience of a genius of his order. Undoubtedly he had many friends—but they were young admirers, who could not give him the companionship that he craved for. But it did bring considerable cheer to his otherwise lonely life to feel the warmth of their devotion and love for him. Prominent amongst these adherents were Satyendranath Datta, Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay, Manilal Ganguly, Hemendrakumar Roy, Dhirendranath Datta, Sourindramohan Mukherji, Premankur Atorthi, Narendra Deb, Amal Home, Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay, Prabhatkumar Mukherji, Jatindramohan and Dwijendra narayan Bagchi. This young group of poets and writers used regularly to meet in a house at Sukea Street, where Manilal Ganguly had his office. Ganguly was the manager of the Kantik Press and the publisher-editor of the magazine *Bharati*. They were staunch admirers of everything that concerned Father and took up such a militant attitude whenever they considered his 'honour' in need of being defended, that they came to be called 'Rabindriks'.



Very few knew or realized the struggle which Father had to carry on his educational experiment at Santiniketan. When the school was established, he had difficulty in getting pupils and those that came were mostly of the difficult type. People looked down upon the institution and ridiculed Father's attempt to introduce new ideas in education. It took years before people began to recognize the Santiniketan school as anything else but a reformatory. To this was added the suspicion of the British Government, and the secret circulars that were issued to warn officials from sending their children to Santiniketan. Considered from a worldly point of view, it was indeed foolhardy of Father to have launched into this misadventure, at a time when he hardly had enough to support himself and his family and was actually in debt on account of the failure of the Kushtia business. He had to dispose of everything he possessed including the ornaments belonging to my mother, in order to start the school. Among other things he had to sell his gold watch and chain—a wedding gift—to a friend. It was a familiar object to us when we were children. We liked to flick open the lid to look at the monogram engraved on the inside. It was therefore a very pleasant surprise to me when the lady who had purchased it from Father many years ago, gave this watch and chain as her wedding present to me in 1910. It has remained a precious heirloom with me ever since.

Financial difficulties increased with the years, as the school expanded. Father had to go to Sir Taraknath Palit, father of his friend Loken Palit, to borrow money. This debt he was unable to repay during Sir Tarak's lifetime. Among other assets, the amount Father owed him was transferred to the University of Calcutta when Sir Tarak died leaving all his property to the University. This debt was a constant source of worry to Father. Whilst Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, had showered all her favours on him, Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, evidently ignored him. Misfortune and bad luck persistently dogged his steps. The lecture-tour in the U.S.A. in 1916-17 was a phenomenal success. It brought enormous returns. Father did not spare himself, because he felt that at last he would be able not only to pay off all his outstanding debts but would no longer be obliged to beg for the funds necessary to develop Santiniketan according to his desire. But his ill-luck intervened. The Bureau

that was handling his lecture-tour very conveniently went bankrupt towards the end of the tour, and instead of the several lakhs due, all that Willie Pearson, who was with Father on that tour, could with difficulty realize were a few thousand rupees, just sufficient to pay off Father's debt to the University.

The sale of Father's books in the continental countries of Europe should have brought him a fortune. But his fame reached its height immediately before the first World War, and this effectively prevented the realization of royalties.

Father had to go constantly on begging missions on behalf of his institution. I was with him in New York in 1920 when an organized effort was made to collect funds in America.

With the help of Mrs. Willard Straight and Mr. Morgenthau (senior), quite a group of Wall Street millionaires had been induced to open the subscription list with handsome donations. Morgenthau, besides his official position—he had been the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey—was himself a Wall Street financier. To bring matters to a head, he gave a banquet at his house to which about a hundred of his millionaire friends were invited. We were assured that Father would get a few million dollars before he left the shores of America. But not even a few thousands came to him.

Father returned to India bitterly disappointed. The weeks spent in New York in a hotel amidst the din and bustle of that noisy city, with the sole object of raising funds, was positively repugnant to him. His sensitive nature rebelled against it. In his letters to Charlie Andrews written during this period, he poured out the anguish of his soul. It was a bitter trial for me also. I felt I was responsible for encouraging Father to go through this humiliating and painful experience. We afterwards came to know that Wall Street closed its purse-strings at the last moment because of a tip sent through Morgan that financial help to a private institution in India would not be looked upon with favour by the British Government.

Although compelled to seek help for his institution, the idea of begging money from monied men, just the people who were least capable of appreciating him and his work at Santiniketan, was painful to him. He would shrivel up when it actually came to the point where he would be expected to make the request. Once a friend of ours, a businessman of Bombay, had arranged

that Father should meet the Gaekwad of Baroda and ask him for an endowment worthy of him. The friend told me that he had found the Prince, who was living at Lausanne, in a very sympathetic mood and that he had already prepared the ground. Father would only have to invite him to lunch and casually mention the matter. He was sure to make a donation sufficiently handsome to put the institution on a sound footing once for all and Father would not have to undertake any more begging tours. I went over to Lausanne and invited the Maharajah to lunch with Father at our hotel in Geneva. At the lunch-table a very interesting conversation was started and carried on from one topic to another, and so absorbed were they that neither my friend nor myself could find an opening to turn it in the direction we wanted. At last Father noticed the look of alarm in our faces and abruptly told the Maharajah of his mission, and wound up his appeal for funds with the advice that if the Maharajah did decide to give any money to him, he should do it as though he were throwing it into the water. On hearing this my friend gave me a hard kick under the table. The Maharajah kept silent and left without making any promise.

It was left to Mahatmaji to realize the tragedy of circumstances that made a poet and a man like Father undertake arduous tours to collect funds for the Visva-Bharati. Once when Mahatmaji met him in Delhi in 1936, and found that Father was trying to raise money through performances of his dance-drama *Chitrangada* by the students of Santiniketan, he asked us what was the amount of deficit which was worrying Father. Before Father left, Mahatmaji gave him a cheque for the amount which he had raised in the meantime and made Father promise that he would never again go out on such a mission.

The money thus secured for us by Mahatmaji came like a windfall, and there was great jubilation amongst those who formed the party. Father, however, was not jubilant; on the contrary, he looked somewhat depressed. It did not take me long to guess his feelings. The promise obtained from him by Gandhiji was too heavy a price to pay for the immediate financial relief. While these arduous journeys meant a lot of physical strain for him, one could easily see that he inwardly enjoyed being with the troupe and witnessing his creation take form in melody and colour and movement. To promise not to accom-

pany these parties would deprive him of one of the greatest joys of his life.

Music and dramatic performances had always formed an essential part of his educational endeavour. By education he meant the fullest self-expression and the development of aesthetic sensibilities. His educational experiment was virtually a search for a fuller way of life. It was the success of this experiment that lent meaning and significance to what is known as Santiniketan education. Whilst Santiniketan functioned in its rural retreat away from towns and cities, her message travelled far and wide through her music, her painting, her dance-recitals and dramatic performances. I do not think I presume too much when I say that Santiniketan has made no small contribution to the moulding of public taste in Bengal, and for that matter throughout the rest of India.

Father's essentially optimistic and cheerful temperament combined with a sense of humour, helped him to overcome the vicissitudes that pursued him relentlessly throughout his life. Financial worries were the least part of them. The death of my mother, when he was only forty-one and in the prime of his creative faculties, came as the first blow. It left him with five children to look after. Two of my sisters were married, but my younger brother was only a child of eight at the time.

Father's worries at this period of his life were more than enough for any man. Besides looking after his own children, there were a hundred others at Santiniketan for whose upbringing he had undertaken the responsibility. And yet he was not to be spared other greater trials. One after the other my grandfather, my two married sisters and my young brother died. My two cousins Balendra and Nitindra, whom father loved like his own sons, died in the prime of their youth. The successive deaths of the young poet, Satish Roy, and of Mohitchandra Sen robbed him of two of his ablest supporters in his work for the Santiniketan School. During all these years of anguish and suffering, Father himself was in constant pain, due to a chronic ailment. The fortitude with which he bore the loss of all those whom he loved most was remarkable. But what was even more remarkable was that these bereavements never made him lose his poise of mind, nor did his creative faculties cease to function or fail for a single moment. On the contrary, his loss and sorrow

seemed to have had an enriching influence of their own and gave greater depth and significance to his writings.

Father had an unusual capacity for work. He was gifted with a remarkably strong constitution. One of my uncles had seen to it that Father should improve and develop this natural gift by physical exercises during his boyhood. Besides other exercises, a professional gave him lessons in wrestling. As a result, Father looked a picture of robust health in his youth. His handsome appearance never failed to attract admiration wherever he went. His soft beard, kept trimmed during his youthful days, and long curls of hair added to the charm of his appearance. At a later age, when he had let the beard grow and wore the flowing dress—a double *djibba*—how often I have overheard people in the West exclaiming in hushed voices, 'How like our Prophet!'

Even in later years I never saw him suffer from any of the common ailments, except from the chronic trouble he had inherited. He was able to get rid of this in 1912 by an operation, after which he enjoyed perfect health for many years until old age. Throughout his life he worked all hours of the day. His day began at about 4 A.M., while it was still dark. Before setting down to work at his writing desk, he used to sit in meditation for half an hour or more every morning. At breakfast he liked company. His hour for this meal was so unusually early that very often the people whom he expected could not turn up. He used to send for them and wait till they came. This was the time when he was in his best form—telling humorous stories, cracking jokes and carrying on brilliant conversation with the people who gathered at the table.

It is surprising how he could compose poems and songs, write novels and essays—very often all at the same time—and yet receive so many callers. He never liked any visitor, whatever his mission, to be kept waiting. His secretaries had a hard time whenever they tried to shield him from unnecessary intrusion. They would be rebuked by Father for their overzealousness. Father did not take any rest during the day. Even during the hottest days of summer, he would sit at his desk and work with the doors and windows wide open, absolutely indifferent to the hot blasts blowing around him. Most of his reading was done at night. There was plenty of time for this, as he did not go to bed till quite late. Four to five hours of sleep was all that he

needed. That he could do so much writing over and above his other work and the time given to visitors, was due to the extraordinary power of concentration he possessed. Nothing seemed to disturb his chain of thoughts. He could leave a poem unfinished, talk to someone for an hour, and then immediately go back and finish it, as though there had been no interruption at all. Neither did any change of surroundings matter. The places and dates given in some of his books of poems show how he was able to compose the poems even under impossible conditions. The only form of rest that he allowed himself when he was tired, was to compose songs and set them to music. Latterly, after he had taken to painting, that also became a favourite form of recreation.

My great-grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, when he visited England in 1844, had taken with him his nephew, Nabin Babu, who acted as a sort of secretary. In one of the letters Nabin Babu wrote home, we find him complaining about his discomfiture in managing his master's affairs in England, because, as he put it, 'Babu often changes his mind'. This observation of Nabin's became a household word in our family, because it applied with even greater aptness to the grandson of the Prince. Even Father would sometimes quote it himself to my wife to justify some sudden change in his plans. We, of course, had got used to this changeable character of his mind, but quite often it led to much misunderstanding and was sometimes followed by disastrous results. Father's receptive and imaginative mind would never accept anything as final. On the contrary, no sooner was anything decided than his mind began to revolt against it, and he would not be content until he had found an excuse to alter the decision. *Status quo* had no meaning for him. This applied not only to his daily life, his wanting always to change his habitation, his food, his dress and such-like things, but to his creative activities as well. He was essentially a revolutionary—only his mission was not to destroy but to build. Whenever his mind revolted against current conventions, whether in literature, in religious beliefs, in social customs, in education or in politics, he would fearlessly criticize and expose what he considered wrong or unjust. At the same time he had constructive ideas to offer as an acceptable alternative and was ready to carry them out himself if no one else dared to do

## ON THE EDGES OF TIME

so. This spirit of revolt against accepted principles and practice, coupled with the desire to experiment with new ideas, persisted till the last day of his life.

What struck me most was the amazing vitality of his mind. Never for a day did he cease to grow. Some of his boldest experiments in literary technique were made late in life, when one is loth to break new ground. He discarded rhymes and turned to *vers libre* when he was about seventy. Some of his stories written about the same time came perilously near to the vexed problem of sex and probably shocked the sensibilities of orthodox readers. His last book of poems, dictated a few days before his death to those who nursed him during his last illness, bore the same mark of experimentation in form and technique. The younger writers had much ado to keep pace with him, and not unoften he beat them at their own game.

No biography, however laboriously written, could ever give an adequate picture of such a complex personality as his. The subtle nuances of a life so delicately lived could only be expressed by a pen as delicate as his own. As a matter of fact, his own writings constitute the best commentary on his life. These reveal him as nothing else does. 'You cannot find the poet in his biography,' he says in one of his poems. Yes, the poet is to be found in his poems. His poems are his best life-story and may I conclude by saying that his greatest poem is the life he has lived.

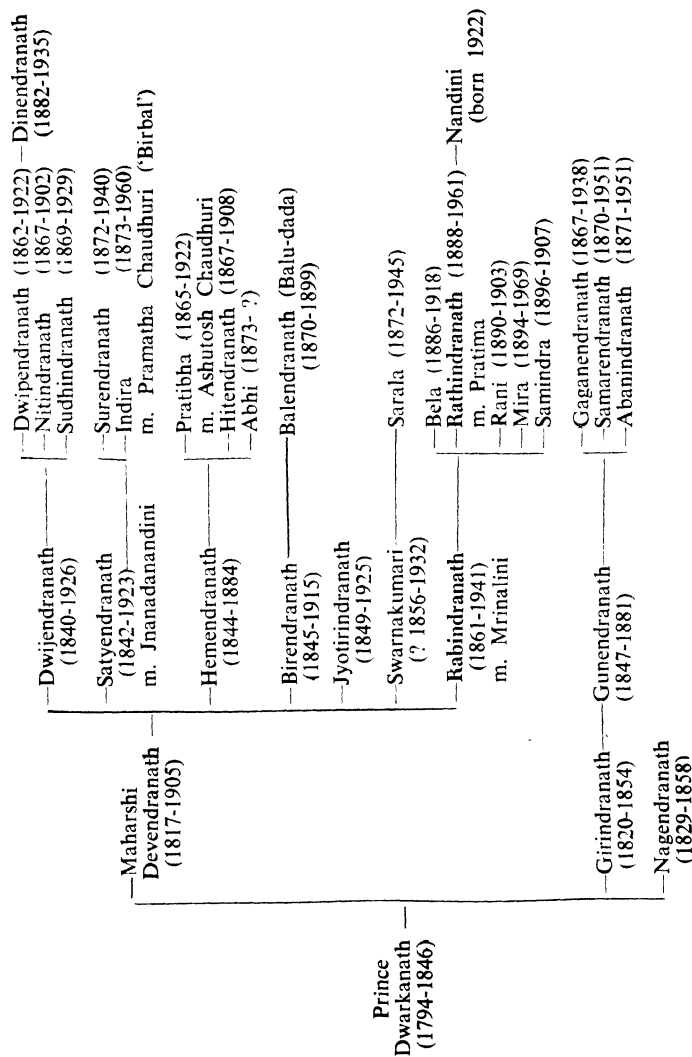
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THE TAGORE FAMILY TREE  
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Table showing members of the family mentioned in the book





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## The Author

Born in Calcutta on 27 November 1888, the author is the Poet's eldest son. He was one of the first batch of five students at Santiniketan in 1901. Educated at Santiniketan and also privately under the guidance of his father and at the University of Illinois, U.S.A., where he obtained his B.Sc., in Agriculture in 1909. Married 1910. Accompanied his father on the *Gitanjali* tour to England and U.S.A. in 1912. Played a leading part in the establishment of the Vichitra Club in 1917. In 1921, after the inauguration of Visva-Bharati, became General Secretary of the Visva-Bharati Society. Became the first Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati when in 1951 it was incorporated as a Central University. Retired in 1953 for reasons of health. Author of several books and is also a well known artist and craftsman. Breathed his last on 3 June, 1961, the year of the birth centenary of the Poet.

